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**THE WORK OF JOSEPH ESTLIN CARPENTER IN THE
FIELD OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF ARTS (RELIGIOUS STUDIES)
IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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The Work of Joseph Estlin Carpenter in the field of Comparative Religion

This thesis examines how Joseph Estlin Carpenter (1844-1927) used his skills in Comparative Religion to propagate a distinctive evolutionary scheme that elevated his own Unitarian Christianity.

1. The introductory chapter looks at Carpenter's life and career and explores some of the written and human sources of inspiration for his Comparative Religion work.
2. Chapter 2 begins with an exploration of the trends and authorities in nineteenth century Unitarianism in both Britain and the USA. Carpenter's Christianity is then examined in depth with a consideration of the different emphases at the different stages of his career.
3. The next chapter considers how Carpenter understood the theory of evolution. Different ways of how Carpenter applied the theory are examined. This is followed by an examination of the criteria he used to determine the evolutionary status of the religions.
4. In Chapter 4, a closer examination is made of Carpenter's assessment of Buddhism and how it was presented in the light of his criteria for advanced evolutionary status.
5. Chapter 5 explores Carpenter's work in relation to Hinduism and how he assessed the religion by application of his evolutionary assessment criteria.
6. The final chapter assesses the intelligibility of Carpenter's evolutionary scheme, his contribution to the inter-faith movement, his contribution to Comparative Religion and his contribution to Unitarian thought.

Rev D V Marshall

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CONTENTS

1 – Carpenter's Life and Career	1
Introduction	1
A Brief Biography	7
Written Sources of Inspiration	21
Conclusion	30
2 – Carpenter's Christianity	32
Introduction	32
Unitarian Christianity in the Nineteenth Century	32
Carpenter's Theology	48
An Appraisal	64
3 – Carpenter and Evolution	70
Introduction	70
Carpenter's Understanding of Evolution	70
Carpenter's Judgment of the Religions	89
The Nature of Evolution	96
4 – Carpenter and Buddhism	102
Introduction	102
Carpenter's Sources of Inspiration	105
The Evolutionary Status of Buddhism	116
An Appraisal	133
5 – Carpenter and Hinduism	138
Introduction	138
Carpenter's Sources of Inspiration	141
The Evolutionary Status of Hinduism	153
An Appraisal	172
6 – An Assessment of Carpenter	178
Introduction	178
Carpenter's Evolutionary Scheme	178
Carpenter and the Inter-Faith Movement	188
Carpenter's Contribution to Comparative Religion	197
Carpenter's Contribution to Unitarian Thought	206
Conclusion	212
Bibliography	215

CHAPTER 1

CARPENTER'S LIFE AND CAREER

Introduction

Joseph Estlin Carpenter (1844-1927) was a Unitarian minister and academic, whose interests were broad and widespread. Although well regarded for his work in church history and theology, he specialised in Biblical Studies and Comparative Religion. Estlin Carpenter was a figure relatively unknown outside Unitarian circles and the question must be asked as to why his work deserves attention.

Carpenter's work is fundamentally an example of how the study of Comparative Religion was carried out with a clear agenda. Comparative Religion was a worthwhile pursuit, in his view, because it pointed to evolutionary developments that were best exemplified by Unitarian Christianity. Carpenter was thus motivated by a desire to promote Unitarian Christianity and focused on aspects of the world's religions that were congenial to the Western student. The religions of the East were presented in such a way that they could be acknowledged as integral elements of God's unfolding revelation.

Carpenter's approach made his works easily readable to the Western student. What a study of his works reveals to us is a Victorian scholar who sought to embrace other religions as integral developments of the one human religious tradition. Carpenter's work was not distinctive, but he was a well-known and competent scholar in his time. There were few other scholars who worked in the same field and he was the first British Unitarian to make such a contribution. He is thus worthy of attention, particularly, but not exclusively, in his Unitarian context.

One should note that the academic community outside the Unitarian movement did not totally ignore Carpenter's work. His contribution was considered very significant and his influence wider than that of "the mere savant", according to his biographer

(Farnell, 1929 p.178). The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church cited him for his extensive knowledge of subjects connected with Comparative Religion and Semitic literature (Cross, 1958, p.239). A more modern publication has acknowledged his contribution, remarking on his impressive range of interests connected with Comparative Religion. "Carpenter was thus no dilettante in comparative religion", it said (Sharpe, 1975, p.130).

Within the Unitarian movement, though, Carpenter had an important place. Carpenter has always been recognised, within Unitarianism, as a major figure in Comparative Religion. As an outstanding Unitarian, Carpenter was acknowledged as a major figure, not only in Comparative Religion, but in a number of other fields too (Holt, 1938, p.338). Unitarians apparently held Carpenter's name with "reverence" as they did with nobody else's in his day (Jones, 1946, p.85). It was suggested that few had made larger contributions to the progress of Comparative Religion (Hall, 1962, p.130). It was even believed that Carpenter's work in Comparative Religion was so influential within Unitarianism that he was instrumental in shifting the theological position of the movement to a more broad and comprehensive one (Hewett, 1968, p.161). All these statements are drawn from important records of Unitarian history and trends.

The object of this first chapter is to consider what prompted Carpenter to become interested in Comparative Religion in the first place. It deals with what it was that continually fed his interest in the subject, and what were the influences, human and textual, that shaped his work. Carpenter did not work in isolation and I shall look at what comparative work was being done in the Victorian era. Carpenter felt impelled to take up the study because of his family history and because he was inspired by certain written material. I shall consider these influences, together with a brief survey of his life and career.

It is important to note here that the term most used by Carpenter, "Comparative Religion", is now problematic. Sometimes, however, Carpenter used an alternative term, "the History of Religion". One should note that "Comparative Religion" is a term that reflects the feelings of the time that Christianity was the norm against which all other belief systems were to be measured. It is a term less appropriate today when academic institutions seek to treat the world's religions with equal consideration. "The History of Religions" or "The Study of Religions" is more in keeping with that sentiment. Thus many university departments of Comparative Religion altered their names in order to express that change in perception.

The Comparative Religion Scene in the Victorian Era

Comparative Religion, though not a new discipline, came to public attention in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century (Sharpe, 1975, p.1). The seminal book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, written by Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was published in 1859 and this had an enormous impact on the scientific world. The search for human origins began at an increased pace and the evolutionary theory expounded by scholars such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), James Hutton (1726-1797), Charles Lyell (1797-1875) and by Darwin was applied vigorously in the field of religion.

The influence of the evolutionary theory was overwhelming. The growing discipline of Comparative Religion embraced it, yet by doing so it appeared to take sides with science in the latter's feud with religion. Christianity had depended on the idea that humanity was the ultimate and supreme act of divine creation and science seemed to undermine that position. To some, religion appeared to be irrelevant and Christianity struggled to retain its dominant position. Roman Catholics and Protestant Christians, with some exceptions, regarded non-Christian religions as beyond salvation. Now there

was a growing interest in examining other religions as part of the project of discovering the phases of human development.

For the exponents of evolution the plurality of religious expression was a puzzle and only scientific methods could find an answer. The principle adopted was that of comparison. Comparing religious beliefs, writings and practices was the means of discovering origins and for this reason the name "Comparative Religion" came to be more widely used.

This non-dogmatic approach to the study of religion had a number of elements. Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) sought a philological approach to the origin of religion. Being convinced that reason and speech grew together he sought to discover the roots of language. This would reveal religious concepts to demonstrate how far the community in question had made sense of its environment. Anthropology, pursued by scholars such as John Lubbock (1834-1913), Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) and Andrew Lang (1844-1912), was another associated discipline. Evolutionary theory had allowed anthropology to investigate religion as a means of demonstrating the stages through which humanity had passed on the way to an advanced spiritual outlook. The psychology of religion, pursued principally by American scholars such as Granville Stanley Hall (1844-1924), James H. Leuba (1868-1946) and William James (1842-1910), also had a part to play. Psychology in the nineteenth century did not limit itself to consideration of human behaviour but was a broader discipline dealing with all non-material aspects of the human mind.

Comparative Religion was a field, then, that the Christian Church did not fully accept. Comparative Religion sought to be scientific and the evolutionary theory gave it additional vigour. Growing in popularity, it had yet to determine its character. It is in such an environment that Carpenter first began to work within the field of Comparative Religion.

Family Antecedents

When one considers why Carpenter took up Comparative Religion one must consider his family background. The interests and activities of members of the Carpenter family were such as to suggest a family bias towards those areas of life sympathetic to the study of the world's religions.

1. Lant Carpenter (1780-1840)

Estlin Carpenter was the grandson of the Rev. Dr. Lant Carpenter, an eminent Unitarian minister who had a distinguished career as an educationalist and social reformer in the cities of Exeter and Bristol. Lant Carpenter was one of the most prominent and influential Unitarians of his day whose writings were wide-ranging. Relevant to Estlin Carpenter's interests in other religions is the contact Lant Carpenter had with Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), the founder of the Indian religious group, the Brahmo Samaj. This was the beginning of the Carpenter family's involvement in Indian affairs. The Brahmo Samaj was a movement that adhered to a spiritual monism of the kind found in the Upanishads, the last works of the Veda, the sacred writings of ancient India.

Before visiting Britain in 1833, Roy contacted Lant Carpenter, considering him to be one of the leading Unitarians of the time. Lant Carpenter saw in Roy's religious stance, particularly his search for a pure monotheism within the ancient writings of Hinduism, the means of establishing Unitarian Christianity in India. He considered Roy the embodiment of his universalist convictions, because of Roy's belief that all religions stemmed from a common monotheistic root. This was a theme taken up much later by Estlin Carpenter. Lant Carpenter's well-received book, *On Rajah Rammohun Roy* (L. Carpenter, 1833) gave full details of his close connections with the Brahmo Samaj and

outlined his belief in Roy's potential to be major figure in the establishment of liberal religion in India. Estlin Carpenter did not know Roy himself but the deep involvement in the affairs of the Brahmo Samaj by the family was a significant inheritance.

2. Mary Carpenter (1807-1877)

There is a further connection with India in the person of Estlin Carpenter's aunt, Mary Carpenter, with whom he had a close affinity and whose biography he was later to write (1881b). Mary made initial contacts with India when a number of Indians came to Bristol whilst she was still young (Goring and Goring, 1984, p.54). She met Roy in 1833 when he visited Britain and attended worship at Lewin's Mead, the Bristol church where her father was minister. This induced her to visit India, which she did in 1866 and then again three more times later. According to her brother, William, her interest in India was further encouraged by visits from young Hindus, some of whom came to visit the philanthropic institutions she had created (W. B. Carpenter, 1877, p.17). Nevertheless, she visited India for the first time in 1866 when she was 60 years of age. She went principally to examine developments in education, prison discipline, and juvenile delinquency. Mary Carpenter always took an interest, as did Estlin Carpenter himself, in concerns connected with social and ethical conditions. In areas where Hinduism was dominant she found that there was what she considered to be prejudice against females in social and educational provision. Such links between the social expression of a major religion and its teachings are what were later to occupy Estlin Carpenter.

Mary Carpenter's links with Indian religious life were due mainly to her association with two Indian religious reformers. The first was Roy who has already been mentioned. The second was Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884), the leader of the Brahmo Samaj many years after Roy's death. Sen has been credited with being the inspiration

behind Mary Carpenter's founding of the National Indian Association (Sargent, 1978, p.122). Even more than Roy, Sen sought to bring together Indian ideas and Christian teaching. This identification of Christian doctrines with Hindu philosophical concepts was also a major feature of Estlin Carpenter's work.

Mary Carpenter's major legacy was a deep affection for all things Indian, a legacy that her nephew inherited. She also wrote about her experiences in India and her impressions of Roy (M. Carpenter, 1875). Therein is to be found a major concern that Estlin Carpenter himself undertook as a basis to the examination of Indian religion, that religion should be understood in terms of its social and ethical culture.

A Brief Biography

Carpenter's Formative Years

In relating the details of the life of Carpenter, one must take into account the limited nature of the manuscripts available. There are a number of letters to and from Carpenter, held in the archives of the Harris Manchester College, Oxford. They are, however, yet to be catalogued and they give only brief indications of the major events of Carpenter's life. The major source of information on Carpenter's life and career, and the first biography about him to be published, is Charles Herford's *Joseph Estlin Carpenter: a Memorial Volume* (1929). This formed the basis for the following account of Carpenter's life history as it includes, not only a detailed account of his career by Herford himself, but also personal recollections by Carpenter's personal friend, J. H. Weatherall (Weatherall, 1929). There is also other information on Carpenter's denominational activities provided, according to Herford, by W. Copeland Bowie (Herford, 1929, p.v).

A more limited use was made in the thesis of two other works (Long, 1986; Deacon, 1977) that made use of unidentified documents included in the aforementioned

collection of archive material at Harris Manchester College. No other original biographical material was available, as Herford's volume is still the most detailed and authoritative commentary on Carpenter's life.

Carpenter was born in 1844, whilst his father acted as tutor to the children of Lord Lovelace, son-in-law of Lady Byron, at Ripley in Surrey. On its removal to London the family became ardent members of the Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel in Hampstead. Here the father, William Benjamin Carpenter (1812-1885), though a famous scientist, took an interest in religion and in the Greek New Testament in particular. He also gave extra-curricular lectures at the University Hall on Sunday mornings on religious subjects.

One of the advantages of having a celebrated academic as a father was that Estlin Carpenter came into contact with a number of learned individuals whose presence was of great benefit to him. These included Robert Chambers (1802-1871), an Edinburgh academic who was an early promoter of the evolutionary hypothesis. Another visitor was Francis Newman (1805-1897), brother to the famous Cardinal, and a professor of Latin at University College. In the Carpenter household intellectual stimulus was certainly not wanting. His father even took him to meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. A biographer of Carpenter referred to the latter's having attended such a meeting when only eleven years of age (Herford, 1929, p.6).

Carpenter pursued his education at the University College School and became a student, first of University College in 1860, and then of Manchester New College from 1863 until 1866. The latter, having begun its life in Manchester and then moved to York, was located at that time in London. The College acknowledged Carpenter as a brilliant student and for this he was awarded a Hibbert scholarship. He gained the award of a

Master of Arts degree from the University of London with marks entitling him to a gold medal.

One incident of note during Carpenter's student years was a spiritual experience he enjoyed whilst walking in the Welsh mountains. He had, until then, endured a period of spiritual barrenness. His religion was intellectual but unsatisfying. Whilst walking in the mountains he felt he had a personal encounter with God, a meeting that brought him happiness and security. It was an experience that gave his ministry, and his life, meaning and fulfilment.

After completing his studies, he first visited Zürich for an extended vacation. While there he was also able to exploit his command of the German language. This enabled him ultimately to translate from the German three volumes of the major tome on the Hebrew Scriptures, *Geschichte Israels*, by G. H. A. Ewald (1871). This was a project that he completed before he was thirty years of age. Although he was not the sole contributor to the production, he was the major translator of most of it and almost entirely responsible for editing. It was this publication that was partly responsible for widespread acceptance of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis, the idea that the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures were compiled from four documentary sources.

There is no evidence that Carpenter read any of the literature in German on the subject of the History of Religions. It was in German, however, that some of the work had already been achieved. For example, the first university to establish courses in the History of Religions, the University of Basel, offered its lectures in German from 1834 when a course was made available on "The History of Polytheistic Religions" (Sharpe, 1975, p.120). Pioneering work in the teaching of the History of Religion had also been undertaken in the Netherlands. Carpenter was later able to add the knowledge of the Dutch language when he mastered it in order to produce *Outlines of the History of*

Religion to the Spread of the Universal Religions (1877), a translation of a work by Cornelius P. Tiele (1830-1902), the Dutch Biblical scholar.

Following a brief period in Switzerland, Carpenter was inducted, by Martineau, into the ministry of the Oakfield Road Church in the Bristol suburb of Clifton. Here he began his serious academic pursuits, establishing the tradition of delivering Sunday evening lectures on the Apocrypha and on Biblical Studies. He also produced his first paper in 1869. This resulted from a request from Charles Beard (1827-1888), the prominent Unitarian writer and essayist, to write a review article for the *Theological Review* on the Bampton Lectures by H. P. Liddon (1829-1870) concerning the divinity of Christ. The article dealt with the work of both Liddon and Jean Réville (1854-1907) under the title, "Liddon and Réville on the Divinity of Christ" (1869).

In 1869 he left Bristol to take up charge of the ministry of Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds. In addition to his pastoral duties Carpenter also furthered his academic interests, giving public lectures on the later periods of religious history and producing material for use by Unitarian Sunday School teachers. He also preached a sermon to the Bradford meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1873. In it he sought a closer relationship than currently existed between science and religion. It was published that year as a book, *The Influence of Science on the Religious Imagination* (1873c).

Carpenter's Career in the Victorian Era

In 1876 Carpenter was appointed to the academic staff of Manchester New College, at that time still located in London, taking up the Chair of Ecclesiastical History, Comparative Religion, and Hebrew. Carpenter was not the obvious choice for the College appointment. He was on good terms with James Martineau who had by now become the College's Principal. He was, however, no specialist in any part of the vast

fields of learning he was called upon to teach. His knowledge of Hebrew was so slight that he requested a year's respite from teaching it in order to improve his own grasp of the subject. He was certainly well read in the other subjects but was hardly a celebrated scholar.

It was also in 1876 that Carpenter first met T. W. Rhys Davids (1843-1922). He it was who inspired him to study the Theravadin Buddhist sacred writings in the original Pali. Under Rhys Davids' guidance, Carpenter acquired a competence in Pali that enabled him to undertake an enterprise lasting over thirty years, the editing of major Pali texts. The first part of the project involved close collaboration with Rhys Davids and produced *The Sumangala-Vilasini; Buddhaghosa's commentary on the Digha Nikaya* (Carpenter, 1886b). Although there was significant editing of Pali texts in this period (Almond, 1988, p.26) this project was particularly difficult. Copies of the commentary were less preserved than the Pitaka texts and they were difficult to procure. The texts were difficult to understand as copyists were prone to making blunders, and many of the passages were simply unintelligible (Carpenter, 1886b, p.viii). Carpenter followed this work by the first two volumes of the most important work of Pali religious literature, *The Digha Nikaya* (Carpenter, 1890a and 1903a). Significantly, Carpenter alone completed the final volume (1911a) which suggests a high degree of philological competence sufficient to satisfy the Pali Text Society that was sponsoring the publication.

One technique in reading the Pali texts that Carpenter shared with Rhys Davids was the listing of parallels between Buddhism and Christianity. Rhys Davids considered the discovery of parallels between different religions as helpful as a starting point in studying the teachings of the world's religions. Rhys Davids asserted, however, that by concentrating on the parallels between another religion and one's own, one could easily draw false impressions.

There are ideas in Buddhism, no doubt, with which we can heartily sympathize; but the most instructive points in the history of that, or of any other religion, are often those with which we can least agree.

(Rhys Davids, 1897, pp.2-3)

Rhys Davids went on to show that it had been acknowledged for centuries that all religions contained elements of the truth and that comparisons could act as a disservice to the study of religion. An apparent overlap of religious concepts could be due to “similar feelings engendered in men’s minds by similar experiences” (1897, p.152). Carpenter felt that the search for parallels was needed at this important stage of inter-religious dialogue. He was cautious, however, as too close a comparison could blur important distinctions (1921b, p.264). In the early days of such a dialogue one no doubt needed an assurance that religions were closer than was at first imagined. At a later stage it was more necessary to recognise distinctive features and accept differences. It is noteworthy that the policy of the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions was to acknowledge such differences as well as the obvious similarities. Before meeting Rhys Davids, Carpenter had shown an interest in Comparative Religion but now he displayed a new and greater enthusiasm. The association with Rhys Davids was to last (Herford, 1929, p.45) and Rhys Davids’ books were required reading for his students and were strongly recommended by him for the general reader (1900d, p.32; 1902a, p.68).

During those early years on the staff of Manchester New College Carpenter produced a number of works on Biblical Criticism and particularly on the Hebrew Scriptures. He achieved this at the same time as he pursued his interest in other religions. That his theology was developing towards a more inclusive outlook that considered other religions more sympathetically is evident from a contribution he made in 1882. This was an address he made to the annual meeting of the National Conference of Unitarian, Liberal Christian, Free Christian, Presbyterian, and other Non-Subscribing or

Kindred Congregations. In it he argued that ministerial students could only develop a faith of qualitative depth if they explored the deeply held convictions of others.

No man, says Goethe, really knows his own language till he knows another also. This is no less true of religion. Not till we have endeavoured to live in the spirit of a religious life different from, nay, perhaps antagonistic to, our own,... can we possibly learn the strength and meaning of beliefs which, when tested by reason and conscience, seem absurd or even immoral (1882b, p.91).

His other published works at this time included his biography of his aunt Mary Carpenter (1881b) and a collection of his father's essays with an introductory memoir by himself (1888b). He produced several other books, of which perhaps the most successful was *Life in Palestine When Jesus Lived* (1884c), a basic book on the background to the Christian Scriptures. This was popular enough to be reissued several times. The year 1884 was important as far as Carpenter's interests were concerned. That was the year of the publication of his *Three Ways of Salvation* (1884a). This was an introductory lecture for a course that would compare Christian ways of salvation, from Paul to Augustine, with the ideas of liberation in Hinduism and Buddhism. This was Carpenter's first major project involving Comparative Religion although he had lectured on the subject earlier and had written simple commentaries on other religions (1880a; 1883a).

In 1889 the College, now renamed simply Manchester College, removed to Oxford, despite opposition from Martineau. Carpenter supported the move as it allowed him to pursue at greater depth his two major interests, Biblical Studies and Comparative Religion. The move to Oxford also brought him closer to those already involved in studies connected with Comparative Religion. Müller still lived there and was editing his *Sacred Books of the East* series. Tylor was employed as Director of the Oxford

Museum, and Andrew Fairbairn (1838-1912) was Principal of Mansfield College. Carpenter thus had ample opportunity to research Comparative Religion, although he continued his interest in Biblical Studies throughout his academic career.

The last decade of the nineteenth century saw a further development of Carpenter's interests in other religions. In 1893 he prepared a paper for the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893b). Carpenter did not give the paper in person, however, and he did not state why it had to be presented *in absentia* (Braybrooke, 1992, p.34). The Parliament was not very representative as only those embracing the liberal position in their respective traditions attended. There were, nonetheless, a number of representatives from several religious groups with whom Carpenter was able to share insights and discoveries. Following the Parliament, he became the first President of the International Council of Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers, the organisation inspired by the Parliament. He was to deliver a number of papers at its congresses in 1903, 1905, 1910 and 1913.

Carpenter's interests in other world religions clearly affected his theological stance. Although Unitarianism had moved to a more radical position less focused on Biblical authority, there was still among many Unitarians a devotion to the person of Christ. Martineau's concept of Christianity did not remove Christ as a focus of devotion, nor was Christ's position reduced to that of a mere religious teacher. Martineau wrestled most vigorously against those who sought to create such a position. Martineau's position had been set out in a letter written in 1859 to Rev. S. F. Macdonald, the Unitarian minister in Chester. In it Martineau asserted emphatically that the Unitarian movement should not distinguish itself from the "General Christian Church" (Drummond and Upton, 1902, p.371). Carpenter's Essex Hall Lecture, *The relation of Jesus to his age and our own* (1895b), was a contrast to Martineau's position. Though he also regretted

the trend to move away from a focus on Jesus, he nonetheless added to the turmoil of the period when new directions were being explored.

Carpenter's lecture was controversial because it disconnected Unitarianism from its former unquestioned acknowledgement of the distinctiveness of Christianity. Unitarianism had previously identified itself as a reformed and rational form of Christianity. Other religions were not taken into account. Carpenter's lecture, however, asserted that there was no evidence for the historical differences of religion. Carpenter's position was that historical justification for Christian superiority had to be laid aside in favour of personal intuition (1903c, p.242). Although Carpenter claimed that he was a Christian, the fear was that Unitarianism would question whether it really was a Christian denomination at all. One modern eminent Unitarian writer claimed Carpenter's lecture as a major factor, within Unitarianism, leading to a much reduced Christology (Hewett, 1968, pp.161-162).

A comparison with the founders of other religions did tend to undermine the uniqueness of Jesus. Their lives had been, according to Carpenter, ultimately deified, having been surrounded by legends of miraculous births and the performance of miracles of healing. The difference with Christianity, said Carpenter, was nothing to do with the person of Christ as a superhuman figure, but as a creator of a practical faith. "They will derive from him the first principles for the education of the social conscience"(1903c, p.267).

When Manchester College had moved to Oxford in 1889, Carpenter had been appointed as a full professor and Vice-Principal. In 1899 Carpenter relinquished both these positions, retaining only the Case Lectureship in Comparative Religion. This lectureship was sponsored by the Case Fund, a sum of money bequeathed by George Case (1824-1883) a former priest of both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. The resources available were to be administered by the Hibbert

Trustees at their discretion. Carpenter's post, along with financial support for the Hibbert Journal, was made available for the first time in 1900 with the creation of the Case Lectureship. Carpenter continued as Case Lecturer in Comparative Religion until 1924.

Carpenter did not give a clear explanation as to why he resigned his posts of Professor and Vice-Principal. He merely cited vague personal reasons. A modern commentator on Carpenter's career has indicated that, whatever the reasons were, the consequence was that Carpenter was freed of the responsibilities that prevented his thorough devotion to academic pursuits (Long, 1986, p.275). Within the next few years Carpenter produced one of his major works, *The Hexateuch* (1900b and 1900c). Although the documentary analysis was carried out by the whole committee of the Society of Historical Theology, Carpenter was responsible for the notes beneath the text, which gave the reasons for the analysis accepted and were sometimes very elaborate. "The Hexateuch" was a term used in the late nineteenth century by biblical scholars such as Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891) and others to describe the first six books of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is usual to group together the first five books under the name of the Pentateuch. Some scholars, however, preferred to include the book of Joshua on the grounds that all six of these books were derived from the same composite sources as the Pentateuch and were a continuation of the narrative. There is little credence given today, however, to the concept of a unified Hexateuch. In 1900 Carpenter published his *A Century of Comparative Religion, 1800-1900* (1900d), a brief consideration of the events and discoveries that contributed to the development of the study of other religions as an academic subject.

Carpenter in the New Century

The next few years were very fruitful for Carpenter as far as Comparative

Religion is concerned. In 1902, for example, he published *Oriental Philosophy and Religion* (1902a), a survey of the religions of the ancient Middle East, India and China. In 1903 he made a major contribution in his address to the second meeting of the International Council of Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers. Other articles supporting his thesis were produced at that time in *The Inquirer* and the entire series of articles was later published as a book (1911b). The original address to the Council, *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World*, made the claim that, though there was a unity of religious consciousness, Christianity was on a higher level than other religions.

Other works at this time include *Christianity in the Light of Historical Science* (1905b). This was a comparison of the Christian doctrines of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection with the Greek mysteries and the Legend of Attis. In 1906, the year Carpenter was appointed as Principal of Manchester College, he produced his paper, "How Japanese Buddhism Appeals to a Christian Theist" (1906a). This showed how the Buddha had evolved from a historical person into a more "mystical" character.

In 1910 Carpenter attended the International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress and was responsible for the writing of the preface to the proceedings. This was a conference attended by Jews, Sikhs, and Buddhists as well as by Christians. This was significant, as previous conferences tended to have little representation from non-Christian groups. Now, Carpenter was meeting and interacting with believers, though on a small scale, who were connected with living, growing religions rather than being solely focused on ancient texts. He began to recognise religion as a major force for social change and improvement. In the preface to the proceedings he pointed out how the religions recognised a mutual concern for the social order and the foundations of morality. They could, therefore, have a major influence upon the powers that shaped civilisation (1910c, p.4).

Though Carpenter concerned himself principally with the ancient texts of the religions of the world, he nonetheless strove to understand the contemporary manifestation of religious adherence. He did this by keeping up a number of contacts, either with religious adherents themselves, or with those who were researchers of Comparative Religion, like himself.

Carpenter had no contacts at this time with traditional forms of Hinduism. He was in touch, however, with the Brahmo Samaj and considered it an authentic expression of Hinduism. This was because it linked the modern Indian with the dawn of history, even though it sought to harmonise Indian and Western ideals. His contacts with them were due primarily to his membership of the International Council of Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers. He was also closely enough identified with the Brahmo Samaj to be asked to address the movement on its eighty-second anniversary in 1912 (Carpenter, 1912b). What attracted him to the Brahmo Samaj was its repudiation of images and of the doctrine of *karma* and its adherence to an ethical position more in keeping with Christian moral values (1912b, p.7).

The Brahmo Samaj, if considered as a genuine Hindu sect, was nonetheless an unusual form of that religion with which to associate. According to one of their leaders, Pundit S. N. Sastri, speaking to the Benares Theistic Conference in 1906, the Brahmo Samaj developed into a religious movement distinct from Hinduism (1907a, p.261). Rejecting the traditional Hindu pantheon, the object of the Brahmo Samaj was to express love and adoration of the Purusha, the primaeval spiritual reality, or Absolute. It was thus an idiosyncratic form of Hinduism, if it is Hinduism at all, with which Carpenter came into direct contact.

In 1912 Carpenter published an essay for the book, *Studies in the History of Religion Presented to Crawford Howell Toy* (1912a). In it Carpenter paralleled Buddhism and Christianity in terms of their myths. What Carpenter tried to do in this

essay was to ask why such parallels existed and whether there had been wholesale borrowing of myth or whether the same legends began from a single source. Carpenter followed this article quickly by one of his most popular books, *Comparative Religion* (1913b). In addition to giving a brief history of the discipline itself, the book lauded the new discipline of anthropology as an integral tool in penetrating the depths of Eastern philosophy. In the book Carpenter claimed that Eusebius (260-340 CE) was the first Christian promoter of Comparative Religion (1913b, p.52) and that Edward Herbert (1583-1648) was the first pioneer of the study in this country (1913b, p.31). The book was important in making clear the problems involved in the study of Comparative Religion, particularly as regards the search for origins (1913b, pp.19f).

In 1915 Carpenter retired from the Principalship of Manchester College, although he was still involved in lecturing. This was due to his appointment, in 1914, as Wilde Lecturer in Natural and Comparative Religion with the University of Oxford, a post he held until 1924. During this time Carpenter did have contacts with other Indians whose religious movement arose directly out of Hinduism. He wrote, for example, to Sasipada Banerjee, the founder of the Devalaya Church Institute, a freethinking and non-dogmatic organisation with Hindu origins (Farnell, 1929, p.178). Carpenter became a regular contributor to its *Quarterly Journal* that was published from 1918. He also contributed to its library. Banerjee's son, Albion, born during his and his wife's visit to Mary Carpenter's house in Bristol, was called by Carpenter "a particle of the Carpenter family" (Herford, 1929, p.82).

Carpenter was also in touch with, and vigorously debated with, a little-known figure called Alokánanda Mahabharati of Behar. Mahabharati was a follower of a religious leader called Thakur Dayananda Deb who believed that the day was close at hand when the people of the world could be united into a formal union. Carpenter scorned such a belief by asserting that the time was far from ripe for such a development

(Herford, 1929, p.83). With another freethinking Indian called Togendra Ghose of Calcutta he shared his views on the need to create a network of friends who “shunned superstitions”. They would also seek the creation of a religious system based on simple theistic principles and devoid of unnecessary doctrines such as that of the Trinity (Herford, 1929, p.84).

As has been indicated, apart from religious sects that were on the fringes of Hinduism, Carpenter had little in the way of contact with contemporary Indian religion. Carpenter had greater contacts with the new Indian Unitarian movement, founded in North East India in 1887 by a convert from Calvinism, than he had with Hinduism (Sparham, 1945, p.6). These contacts, however, were unlikely to further his knowledge and understanding of Indian religion.

With other religions also there is little evidence of his having had much in the way of personal contacts. There are some exceptions, however. There is evidence that he visited Palestine and his letters from there indicate some appreciation of the Islamic religion (1873d). Furthermore, his biographer suggested that Japanese scholars highly estimated Carpenter's work and that he maintained friendly relations with a number of oriental teachers (Farnell, 1929, p.178). He also attended most of the conferences of the International Council of Unitarian and other Religious Thinkers and Workers and thus came into contact with devotees from other traditions. Against this one must recall, however, that in its early days there were few representatives from other religions. There were a few Jews, Muslims and Hindus but the vast majority were Protestant Christians and Unitarians (Traer, 2000, p.4).

The later period of Carpenter's career was one of the most fruitful in terms of the output of work. He visited the United States, for example, and gave a number of addresses on modern developments in Unitarian thought (1918). This period also saw the publication of his most celebrated work, *Theism in Medieval India* (1921b),

originally given as lectures in 1919. In this book there was no assessment of the problems of Comparative Religion, nor were there, on the whole, any comparisons with Christian teachings. The aim of the book was to distinguish between the various periods in the history of Indian religious philosophy, beginning at the earliest stage. This book is full of close analysis and detail. In addition to dealing with philosophical speculation the book shows how Carpenter understood some Eastern religions as being basically theistic. He untangled the many influences that led to the deification of religious founders. The book also dealt in great detail with the teachings of the leaders of the *bhakti* elements in Indian religion, Ramanuja, Ramananda, Chaitanya and Kabir. Throughout the book he laid out the doctrines in each stage of development without comparing them with other religions.

Carpenter's last major work on Comparative Religion was *Buddhism and Christianity - a Contrast and a Parallel* (1924a). In this essay he made more of the contrasts between the two religions. He found it difficult to come to terms with Buddhism's doctrine of *karma* and its lack of a need for a personal God. He also made much of the absence, in Buddhism, of a divine Creator, and of the permanent Self. He considered these to be important factors that differentiated Buddhism from Christianity. While he respected other religions, and had a particularly high regard for Buddhism, he nonetheless still considered Christianity superior.

Carpenter died on 2nd June 1927, aged 82, shortly after producing his final work, "The Johannine Writings, a Study of the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel" (1927d), an article produced for the magazine he was always keen to support, the *Hibbert Journal*.

Written Sources of Inspiration

Carpenter was prompted to take up the study of Comparative Religion after

being inspired by a number of writings by various authors. Carpenter made use of their work in his own contributions and cited them as significant to his own thinking.

Major Sources

Carpenter was familiar with the work of many scholars who took an interest in the religions of the world. For example, Max Müller was a major source upon whose work Carpenter drew. Max Müller approached Comparative Religion through his interests in Comparative Mythology and Philology and by a study of some of the sacred texts of the East. He was a friend (Long, 1986, p.274), a correspondent and associate whose work impressed Carpenter, although the latter did not accept the worth of all Max Müller's claims. Carpenter, for example, acknowledged that most scholars had abandoned the philological identifications that were central to Max Müller's thesis (1913b, p.175).

Max Müller's great project was the editing of the *Rig Veda*, a task that was undertaken firstly in Paris, and then, for the rest of his career, in England. Max Müller's major focus was to explain the connections he believed existed between religion, mythology, language and the human mind. He had an interest in seeking out the origin of religion in the mind but was also concerned about the appropriate method of studying religion in order to interpret the evidence. For Max Müller, the origin of religion lay in the acknowledgement of something significant lying behind the finite entities perceived by the mind. Religion, he said, was the combination of that acknowledgement with an integral moral sense (1892, p.169). The religion that most closely approximated the ideal of Natural Religion was one that existed before the decay brought on by institutionalism. Max Müller's candidate was the religion of Vedic India (1898, p.25).

Max Müller's method involved the creation of a science of human thought. This he sought through the four stages of the science of language, the science of mythology,

the science of religion and the science of thought. Thought, he believed, began with language and he thus believed that the growth of language and the growth of thought were intertwined. The science of mythology developed out of a period that Max Müller felt was characterised by a loss of faith in intellectual processes (1881, p.306). A period of temporary insanity occurred when the mind began to personify the great powers of nature. Claiming that the Indo-European languages had no abstract words, he indicated that “nature-words” acquired gender and thus apparently abstract nouns took on personal character (1856, p.72).

Max Müller’s science of religion was developed from a close examination and comparison of the data of mythology. Religions were classified according to the historical types of Aryan, Semitic and Turanian. The study of these religions would give insights into the nature of religion, into human nature and into the nature of the human mind. Thus the science of religion and the science of thought were connected.

Carpenter’s own work in the field paid tribute to the attempts by Max Müller to encourage the West to familiarise itself with the thought forms and philosophies of the East. References to Max Müller’s researches feature in many of Carpenter’s writings, including *Comparative Religion* (1913b), *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World* (1911b), and *A Century of Comparative Religion 1800-1900* (1900d). In Carpenter’s historical writings on the development of Comparative Religion he considered Max Müller’s work on Eastern texts as of tremendous value, particularly the latter’s translations of the Rig Veda from *the Sacred Books of the East* (Carpenter, 1903c, p.182).

Carpenter considered Max Müller the major authority on the sacred texts of the East in general (1902a, p.33; 1902b, p.12) and on the Sanskrit of the major Indian sacred writings in particular (1923, p.720). He also believed Max Müller to be the scholar best able to deal with the origins of religion (1890d, p.182). Max Müller was also

acknowledged as the major originator of the theory that identified the Hindu gods with those of ancient Greece (1913b, p.175).

One of the aspects of Max Müller's outlook that was not unlike Carpenter's was the belief that a study of the world's religions would elevate Christianity. Max Müller claimed that a better type of Christianity would be revealed when compared with Indian religion. He made a distinction between the institutional type of Christianity and the "true" Christianity, the "religion of Christ" (1899, p.28). Max Müller's justification for his statement that Comparative Religion elevated Christianity was that a study of Eastern texts would show Christianity to have the deepest spirituality. The sacred books of the East, he claimed, simply could not be compared with the Christian Scriptures, some of the stories in the Sanskrit books being, for example, "absurd and even revolting" (1891, p.203). Christianity, he felt, would prove itself to be the "purest, the truest religion the world has ever seen" (1891, p.363).

In seeking the sources of inspiration for Carpenter's work in the field of Comparative Religion one must also consider another scholar whose work he valued, Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899). Monier-Williams, though Indian-born, was raised in England but was intended for service in India after graduating from the East India Company's Haileybury College. Instead he studied Sanskrit at Oxford and then taught Eastern languages at Haileybury College. In 1860 he became Boden Professor of Sanskrit. Monier-Williams' major preoccupation was with classical Sanskrit rather than with the Vedic literature of the earlier phase of Indian literary history. He edited a number of texts and wrote Sanskrit grammar books, including a Sanskrit-English dictionary (1899). He also produced a number of translations and his *Indian Wisdom* (1876) consisted mainly of translated passages of Sanskrit literature. A major concern of his was to promote missionary activity in India. He thus wrote a number of books to

spread the knowledge of Indian religion in England. These included *Modern India* (1878) and *Buddhism* (1889).

What is of note in Monier-Williams' work is that he had an idealised form of Christianity against which other religions were compared. What was unusual, however, was the degree of tolerance he demonstrated towards other religions. He could not countenance criticism of the beliefs of Indian religions until the scholar had made a life-long study of Indian literature and examined beliefs and practices as they were to be found in India itself (Reprint 1974, p.iv). His methodology thus involved an attempt to hold back from allowing his personal faith to influence his interpretation of Indian religion. He also sought to observe Indian religion, not only in its texts, but in the way it was characterised by its religious observances in the field. His aim was to present accurate information, supported by personal evidence.

Carpenter cited Monier-Williams as a major authority on the Hindu doctrine of the *trimurti* (1921b, p.233), on the Book of Manu (1902a, p.12) and on the modern manifestation of the Hindu cultus (1892a, Part III, p.3). Carpenter's sympathy for other religions and his reluctance to use pejorative terms for their doctrines is reminiscent of Monier-Williams' avoidance of terms such as "heathen" and "idolatry" (1878, p.232). Carpenter was not uncritical of Monier-Williams, however, as he considered the latter responsible for creating a distinction between true and false religion.

The late Sir M. Monier-Williams described Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism, as the "three chief false religions" (1900d, p.7).

Nonetheless, it was Monier-Williams who avoided the use of Christian words for Pali or Sanskrit terms and rejected the commonly accepted Western notion that *karma* implied a lack of incentive for moral behaviour. This was a far more progressive approach than even that of Carpenter himself.

The work of another individual had an indirect effect upon Carpenter's decision to pursue Comparative Religion as a focus for his studies. Moncure Daniel Conway (1836-1896), formerly an American Methodist, had become Minister of the South Place Chapel in London in 1866. This was an independent congregation that sought adherents from anyone desiring to pursue the spiritual life, regardless of theological differences of belief. The sole condition of membership was that they did not raise to a dogma the non-existence of God. The chapel included amongst its members, not only various kinds of theists, but also pantheists and positivists of the school of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) (d'Alviella, 1886, p.119).

Conway gathered together with great discrimination a collection of more than 700 passages. These were drawn from various ancient authors for use in the worship services of the South Place Chapel (d'Alviella, 1885, p.121). This collection was eventually published as *The Sacred Anthology; a Book of Ethical Scriptures* (Conway, 1876) and was used, not only by his own congregation, but by a number of Unitarian congregations also. Conway sought to include in the book only that which he deemed to be of moral value. There was nothing in it that could have been considered as theologically speculative. Conway's aim was to separate what he believed to be universal and enduring from "the rust of superstition and the dross of ritual" (1876, p.xiii).

Conway's book did tend to include material that would have a broad appeal. On the other hand there is little to satisfy the theist or those yearning for a focus on the great religious teachers. The writings included were broad and general and inadequate for most worshipping communities. Carpenter found the book to be impressive in its historical grasp of such widely different religious traditions and their characteristic ethics. He felt, however, that a system of ethics had to be more than a proclamation of duties. Carpenter felt that there was a deeper ethical code found within the world's

religions. This was not simply a collection of isolated principles but was something integrally connected with belief in a personal God (1903c, p.322). Nonetheless, Conway's book was a spur and a valuable source of inspiration (1918, p.21).

Unitarian Sources

Carpenter expressed sympathy with the writings of American Unitarian scholars who were researching the beliefs of the world's religions and whose works he recommended to his readers. One such was William Rounseville Alger (1822-1905), a minister who combined effective pastoral work with a number of works on theology and philosophy. Alger was also an editor of Martineau's essays and a frequent contributor to *The Christian Examiner*. His greatest work was his *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life* (reissue, 1968). The book, the original of which was produced in 1860, was a detailed description of the major teachings of the world's religions. It placed the doctrines of the religions of the East alongside those of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures with the aim of showing up similarities and differences. The major focus of the book, however, was to highlight what Alger considered was evidence of a universal religious experience. The book did treat other religions as if they had the same concerns and outlook as Christianity. Nonetheless, it did make the doctrines of other religions accessible. This is what Carpenter found to be so valuable about Alger's book. The book rejected the idea that Christianity was the only religion derived from a personal founder or the sole possessor of sacred books containing important truths. "With clear-eyed perception did one of the best loved Boston pastors grasp the significance of the new knowledge" (Carpenter, 1925a, p.16).

Carpenter displayed some sympathy for American Unitarians who were closely connected with the Transcendentalist movement. Like Martineau's radical influence on British Unitarian theology, Transcendentalism in the United States was similarly far-

reaching. Challenging traditional Bible-based Unitarianism it was influenced by German philosophy and the new Biblical Criticism and was inspired, amongst others, by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). This radical school of thought called for a natural religion authenticated by the inner witness of the truth. It both questioned the miraculous foundations of Christianity on the one hand and found sympathy with the religions of the East on the other. Its aim was to acquaint people at first hand with Deity and to place supreme emphasis on the inner experience of the soul. The Transcendental Club, sometimes known as the Symposium, formally established itself in 1836 under the leadership of a number of individuals, the most celebrated of them all being Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882).

One American Transcendentalist who was a precursor of Carpenter's, and to whom Carpenter paid tribute, was James Freeman Clarke (1800-1888), a minister and academic. Clarke had been the first American to bring into the pulpit the ideas of German idealism. Having been influenced in particular by Hegel, Clarke's Unitarian and Transcendentalist connections led him to seek theological meaning in religious traditions other than those of Christianity. Over against the total condemnation of "heathen" religions in the Christian tradition, the Transcendentalists discovered therein God's universal providence.

Accordingly, it has become more usual of late to rehabilitate heathenism, and to place it on the same level with Christianity, if not above it (Clarke, 1871, p.14).

Clarke was extremely influential in the development of the new discipline that was to become known as Comparative Religion. His studies in the field began in the early 1840s although it was not until 1867 that he gave lectures on the History of Religion whilst Professor of Theology at Harvard University. In 1871 Clarke made his greatest contribution to Comparative Religion when Volume I of his two-volume *Ten*

Great Religions (1871) was published, Volume II being published in 1883.

Clarke wrote these two volumes in such a popular style that they were easily readable by members of the general public. Comparative Religion thus became available to the world beyond academia. What the two books did was to summarise the ten world religions chosen for study. The ten religions he examined were Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Scandinavian and Hinduism (all of which he labelled “ethnic” religions), and Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism (the religions he called “catholic”). Individual histories of the religions were related and the origin and development of religious doctrines examined. Clarke’s book was genuinely comparative in that the religions were compared in accordance with a number of topics. These included topics such as God, the Soul, the Future Life, Prayer and Worship, and Salvation.

Clarke’s thesis was that as the “ethnic” religions had reached a higher plane of development than the tribalism of primal peoples, so the “catholic” religions had reached even higher stages of spiritual advancement than the “ethnic” religions (Clarke, 1883, pp.29-32). At the highest level, however, was Christianity, the only religion that could be a fulfilment of the other “catholic” religions.

(Christianity was) the fullness of truth, not coming to destroy
but to fulfil the previous religions, capable of replacing them
by teaching all the truth they taught and supplying that which
they have omitted (1871, p.31).

In Clarke’s view, Christianity was objectively superior because of a distinctive universality and a flexibility that opened it up to constant change and reform (1871, p.30).

Clarke found some knowledge of God in all the religions of the world though he believed that God’s revelation was only fully disclosed in the Christian faith. Clarke believed that Christianity bore “an all-sidedness that marks it for a still larger catholicity

hereafter" (1883, p.363). This viewpoint, sometimes called "preparationism" regarded the world's religions as "signposts on the path which has its terminus in Christ and the Christian faith" (Hoehler, 1990, p.41). Clarke believed in an evolutionary progression that would lead all believers to a radicalised and transformed Protestant Christianity. In his *Steps of Belief* (1870), Clarke showed how atheism developed into theism, and how this in its turn developed into Roman Catholic Christianity. Progress then came in the form of the Protestant Christianity that he considered as the highest form yet of religious expression. He believed that all religious development was a progression to this "higher" form of religion.

Though there was no direct communication between Carpenter and Clarke, Carpenter did express his knowledge of Clarke's pioneering work and his belief in Clarke's distinctive contribution to the growing discipline of Comparative Religion (1925a, p.16). Clarke's books were being published in Carpenter's early days when he was beginning to develop his own interests in world religions.

In his little volume on *Orthodoxy, its Truths and Errors* (1866), Clarke gave proof at once of his insight and his faculty of reconciliation. These qualities were displayed with notable breadth in his survey of *Ten Great Religions* (1871), which brought the wide range of Comparative Religion within the reach of ordinary readers (Carpenter, 1925a, p.16).

Conclusion

Carpenter's scholarship had international academic recognition for he was awarded no less than six doctorates from universities in the United States, Europe and Britain. Most importantly for him, the University of Oxford honoured him twice, bestowing upon him a D.Litt. in 1906 and a D.D. in 1923. Carpenter's work covered an enormous field of interest including, as well as Biblical Studies and Comparative

Religion, social issues, ecclesiastical history, the history of doctrine, memorial sketches, and a number of well-received intellectual sermons. He was still producing work until closely before his death in 1927.

Carpenter was a Unitarian, indeed a devout Unitarian Christian. In the way he approached the other religions of the world it is important to ask what kind of Christianity he held and how it informed his work in Comparative Religion. This is the question I have examined in Chapter 2. In subsequent chapters I go on to consider the distinctive form of evolutionary theory that characterised Carpenter's presentation of the religions of the world.

CHAPTER 2

CARPENTER'S CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

Throughout his career Carpenter continually asserted his belief that Christianity was the most advanced form of religious expression. "The phenomenon of Christianity" was described by Carpenter as "the mightiest incident in the world's history" (1907c, p.115). His form of Unitarianism was still focused on the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and on the nature and work of Jesus Christ (1925a, p.3). He was, however, critical of traditional Christianity, and the form of Christianity he promoted was of a decidedly liberal or Unitarian kind. This chapter will consider Carpenter's Christian theology and will lay the ground for an examination of the way he viewed other religions. I shall give attention to the developments in his thinking from his earliest writings onwards and how his Christian theology gradually became less Christocentric and less exclusive. Carpenter's work did not emerge in isolation, however. In order to put Carpenter into context it is necessary to consider the theological position of British Unitarianism in the nineteenth century. I shall therefore consider the Unitarian environment into which Carpenter was born and within which he worked.

Unitarian Christianity in the Nineteenth Century

In the period immediately before Carpenter began his work, Unitarianism bore three distinctive characteristics. Firstly, it was a Bible-based movement and looked to scriptural teaching for authority. Secondly, reason was now identified as a valuable indicator of religious truth. Thirdly, there was a growing interest in other world religions. There was, however, a tension between all three. At the beginning of the

nineteenth century, and even well into the century, Unitarianism in Britain could best be defined as scriptural. There was a concern for the use of reason in the interpretation of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures but the early Unitarians maintained that the Scriptures were rational. There was little debate about the divine status of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures for they were believed to contain the word of God handed down to humanity for implementation.

There were some Unitarians who took a more radical position. These were following in the tradition of Priestley, the most important name in the early history of Unitarianism in Britain and America (Short, 1968, p.253). Priestley's Unitarianism involved a denial of the miraculous birth of Jesus believing instead that he was born at Nazareth with the same physical, mental and moral imperfections as other human beings (Gow, 1928, p.88). He believed that Jesus's character was only gradually formed and improved. This was going beyond the scriptural Unitarianism that continued to be the prevalent type down to the time of Martineau. It meant a doubting of the accuracy of the Gospels. This may seem to be an anticipation of modern Biblical criticism but there was no profound or detailed study of the text. On the other hand Priestley accepted the miracle of the Resurrection, as Unitarians did at that time. The doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement were regarded as corruptions of primitive Christianity and Priestley had little regard for the early Fathers or for the early Church Councils. They were all condemned without sympathy (Gow, 1928, p.89).

Excluding the radical minority that followed Priestley's position, however, Unitarianism at the beginning of the nineteenth century was wholeheartedly scriptural. Apparent contradictions did not prevent Unitarians from upholding the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as the focal point of their faith. Unitarians argued against the doctrine of the Trinity, not because of its irrational nature, but because they could find no scriptural justification for it. In a work first published in 1712, Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), a liberal Anglican whose work was highly valued by Unitarians, had discovered

1,251 passages to suggest that the doctrine of the Trinity was non-scriptural (Clarke, 1712, p.44).

By the early part of the nineteenth century little had changed in the attitude of Unitarians to the status of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Although Unitarians differed from the mainstream churches in their repudiation of traditional Christian doctrines, in their reverence for the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures they were not far removed from the position of other Protestant movements of the time.

The early Reports of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, founded in 1825, show clearly what it considered the theological and religious position of Unitarian Christianity at that period. The position is summed up in the following statement from the twenty-sixth Annual Report.

The English Presbyterian Churches long ago pledged themselves to the great principle that the Bible, and the Bible only, is the Religion of Protestants... Calmly, but perseveringly, it is the object of this Society to give strength and influence to that principle (British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 1851, p.2).

It was not the infallibility of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures that was affirmed but their supremacy and sufficiency as a rule of faith and life. "Convince us that any tenet is authorized by the Bible, from that moment we receive it" (Wellbeloved, 1823, p.3). Jesus was presented as a man chosen by God to bring in a new moral dispensation, and, receiving the Holy Spirit at his baptism, was awarded supernatural abilities in order to carry out his mission as Messiah. The evidence for his role was the Resurrection.

By the middle of the century things began to change (Short, 1968, p.254). In British Unitarianism, two positions began to develop. The more conservative wing was aggressively denominational and stuck doggedly to traditional beliefs of doctrinal and

Biblical Unitarianism. The more liberal wing laid little stress on particular doctrines and instead emphasised tolerance and spiritual depth. The British and Foreign Unitarian Association had never been strictly Bible-based and it resisted any attempt by its affiliates to impose upon it a dogmatic basis. Its influence in moving away from scriptural Unitarianism cannot be ignored.

The change to a more freethinking position came about by the influence of a number of inspirational and forceful teachers and preachers. Some of them were American, and, though it is unclear how effective communications were between the American and British movements, the similarity of thinking between leading liberals in both countries suggests some exchange of ideas. Carpenter himself was familiar with developments in American Unitarianism, some of the then current issues being dealt with in his introduction to *Freedom and Truth* (1925a). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Carpenter visited America and delivered a number of sermons in New York that dealt with developments that were common to both American and British Unitarians (1918).

In American Unitarianism there was an acknowledgement of the authority of the scriptures but there was also a tendency in some quarters to question them. These ideas were revolutionary and were to enable British Unitarians to look both inwardly for the working out of their Christian theology and beyond Christianity for inspiration for their spirituality. The leading exponents of such ideas included Channing, Emerson, Parker and Martineau. To understand the work of these Unitarian leaders is to appreciate the intellectual movements that were taking place at the time in which Carpenter lived and worked.

William Ellery Channing (1780-1842)

Channing, the founding father of American Unitarianism, was so influential within American Unitarianism that he has been called “the Apostle of Unitarianism” (Carter, 1902, p.29). It is important to know something of Channing’s contribution to

Unitarianism owing to the fact that Carpenter considered his work as a major factor in detaching Unitarianism from its loyalty to scriptural authority. He was, said Carpenter, a great initiator of new thinking whose work was focused upon the “great principles” of revealing the irrational nature of many Christian doctrines (1925a, p.6). Though a writer on Milton, Napoleon and Fénelon, Channing was principally a pastoral minister in Boston and a social reformer. Channing was no great theologian, but he was a great preacher and his fundamental conviction of the goodness of human nature impelled him to challenge mainstream Christian views on the Fall and the Atonement.

Channing’s seminal work was his sermon preached at the ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks in Baltimore in 1819. In that sermon, Channing asserted his belief in the supremacy of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Christians had to interpret them, however, by applying reason and by devoting themselves to righteousness. These principles, he said, could undermine their ultimate authority.

With these views of the Bible, we feel it our bounden duty to exercise our reason upon it perpetually, to compare, to infer, to look beyond the letter to the spirit, to seek in the nature of the subject and the aim of the writer his true meaning; and, in general, to make use of what is known for explaining what is difficult, and for discovering new truths (Channing, 1884, p.279).

Channing’s aim was to establish a higher standard of truth than the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. He dwelt on the ethical teaching of Jesus and on the example of his life and death. The divine in Jesus was to him a revelation of the divine within all humanity. His life’s work was thus continually to encourage people to recognise humanity as basically divine.

Channing’s position was a contrast to the traditional Unitarian position that argued that the Christian revelation was true quite simply because it was guaranteed by

prophecy, by miracles and by the Resurrection. The ultimate proof of the claims of Christianity, by these standards, had been the statements contained within the Christian Scriptures. Channing did not deny that the Christian Scriptures had a miraculous content, but this, he felt, was unimportant. This position was not so far removed from the suggestion that there was no miraculous aspect of the Christian Scriptures at all.

At this juncture it is important to ask why Channing was so important to Carpenter. Firstly, Carpenter adopted Channing's approach, that Christian belief could be justified without reference to scriptural authority. This was what Carpenter identified as the first major aspect of Channing's Baltimore ordination address (1925a, p.6). Carpenter, too, claimed that it was a mistake to place too much authority on the Bible (1911b, p.100).

Secondly, Channing was important to Carpenter because of the former's belief in the supreme significance of monotheism. For Channing, the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, was to be repudiated, not because of a lack of scriptural support, but because he felt it undermined the notion of the unity of God.

In the first place, we believe in the doctrine of God's UNITY,
or that there is one God, and one only. To this truth we give
infinite importance (Channing, 1819, p.280).

Carpenter noted this emphasis that Channing made on the significance of monotheism (1925a, p.6) and himself affirmed his belief that monotheism was an integral aspect of any religion that was, in evolutionary terms, at an advanced stage (1920, p.485). This aspect of Carpenter's religion will be pursued in Chapter 3.

Thirdly, Channing was considered by Carpenter as important because of Channing's belief in the inherent ability of humanity to build ethical principles based on the guidance of conscience (1925a, p.6). Carpenter considered the subject of ethics as a major factor in determining the status of any religion. For Carpenter, like Channing, the true nature of a religion was determined by the ability of its leaders to create among its

followers a determination to nurture what Carpenter called a “moral endeavour” (1906a, p.504).

Channing was the first of the great Unitarian teachers whose approach, though derived from the Christian Scriptures and dependent on them, nonetheless appealed to an inner light and an inward experience. His approach led to a major re-assessment of the Unitarian position. Carpenter was part of that re-assessment and these developments were to affect how he approached the comparative study of religions.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Emerson, about whom more will be said later in the thesis, was a literary and philosophical figure of considerable significance. He served a Unitarian congregation for less than three years, resigning because of a disagreement concerning the administration of the Communion Service. Influenced by the Romantic Movement and German Idealism, Emerson devised a philosophy that combined rationalism and mysticism, founded on a belief in the supreme significance of the human soul, the highest revelation of God. He had a great influence on the shape of American Unitarianism, which can be traced back specifically to the Divinity School Address in 1838 (Emerson, 1838, pp.105-110), a valedictory address to graduating ministerial students in Harvard.

Emerson's address was an attack on traditional supernaturalist Christianity. He began by stressing the importance of religious feelings, the sentiment of virtue, something that could never be experienced at second hand. This could be illustrated, he said, in the history of religion, especially in Christianity. In Emerson's view, traditional Christianity enshrined two basic errors; its Christology with its emphasis on miracles and a unique literal incarnation; and its false view of revelation, which must never be placed in the past.

The Divinity School Address caused grave offence to traditional Unitarians.

Emerson was charged with denying the idea of a personal God, of belittling Jesus and of destroying the essential supernatural basis of Christianity. Nonetheless, Emerson's contribution deeply impressed many Unitarians. Emerson was important for Carpenter for two major reasons. Firstly, Emerson's freedom of belief allowed him to read Indian sacred literature with great interest. In fact, Emerson had a passion for any sacred literature he could find from the East. Unlike Carpenter, Emerson had no interest in the history or context of the ideas he found therein. Nonetheless, his efforts, along with others in the Transcendentalist Movement, helped to create a climate in the United States that enabled Comparative Religion to grow. Emerson's work impressed Carpenter in that, at least as far as Unitarianism was concerned, Emerson helped to destroy doctrinal uniformity. He made acceptable the search for insight beyond Christianity. For Carpenter, this meant permission was given to treat newly discovered ideas seriously. "The dogmatic fabric of ecclesiastic orthodoxy fell in ruins on the ground" (1925a, p.7). Religious truth, according to Emerson, was now to be found within, as the human soul contained the means of securing wisdom (Carpenter, 1900d, p.8).

Secondly, for Carpenter, Emerson was important because, despite his independence of mind, Emerson was still, at this stage in his career, devoted to the work of Jesus Christ. Emerson objected to the doctrines built by the Church around the person of Christ. To Emerson, Christ was not a miracle worker, nor was he a person of the Trinity. Nevertheless, he was still a focus for true religion. He was later to develop a more eclectic and even syncretistic religious position but the Divinity School Address, though radical, was still an affirmation of Unitarian Christianity.

Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw
with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe
harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his
being there (Emerson, 1838, p.108).

Carpenter, too, despite his incursions into Eastern religion, never renounced his belief that Jesus Christ was the supreme religious figure, a living human experience, the quality of whose teachings elevated him to a position of eminence (1910d, p.13).

Theodore Parker (1810-1860)

Parker was another American preacher who had an influence on the way Unitarian theology was developing. Carpenter considered Parker one of the major founders of “the New Reformation”, a movement in England and America extending in many directions beyond organised Unitarianism (1925a, p.8). Parker was a minister, principally in Boston, who was celebrated mainly for his work in the cause of the abolition of slavery. A major American Unitarian intellectual, he is noted for his wide-ranging interests in politics and the social sciences. His major work of theology was an ordination sermon given in 1841, and later published, as *The Transient and Permanent in Christianity* (1864). The permanent element was the body of great religious and moral virtues, the type of approach to life that Jesus had demonstrated in his own lifetime. The transient element was the collection of practices and teachings of the Christian Church, particularly the belief that the Christian Scriptures contained a special revelation, and the concept of the uniqueness of Christ’s nature.

Parker’s theology was further systematised in his *A Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion* (1863). His thesis was that human nature bore a religious faculty, as well as a moral, emotional and intellectual faculty. It was the religious faculty that manifested in humanity a recognition of the Infinite and Absolute. This operated in the same way that the senses brought external objects to one’s attention. This religious faculty, later built on by Reason, would come to the conclusion that there was a God, infinite in intelligence, love and justice.

The significant point about Parker’s work is that the apprehension of God, one aspect of the permanent in religion, was a faculty that everyone could enjoy. Thus, the

different teachings of the religions were less important than the fact that there was individual human potential to discern the presence of God. This was a major step in the development of Unitarian thinking. The implication of Parker's position was that Christianity was therefore no better and no worse than other religions. Parker was a Christian, but to him Christianity was not a doctrinal system but the absorption of the virtues encapsulated in the life of Jesus.

Carpenter's theology followed similar lines to those of Parker. Carpenter acknowledged the influence of Parker in his own search for the origin of religion. This was to be discerned, said Carpenter, in inner experience, an idea he credited entirely to Parker (1900d, p.8). It is also interesting to note Carpenter's sermon *Things New and Old* and its claim for a distinction to be made between, firstly, the essentials of religion that were abiding and, secondly, unnecessary elements, such as detailed doctrines, which were impermanent.

But the Church of the future can never sever itself wholly from
the faiths of the past; they may be transmuted, purified,
expanded, enriched, idealized; they cannot be eliminated or
destroyed (Carpenter, 1910d, pp.3-4).

This sermon followed very closely that of Parker in his *The Transient and Permanent in Christianity*.

Religious doctrines and forms will always differ, always be
transient as Christianity goes forth...but the Christianity lioly
men feel in the heart...is always the same thing to each soul
that feels it (Parker, 1864, p.24).

Carpenter's Christianity, like Parker's, was not doctrinal but was the product of the development in human understanding and experience that led one to apprehend the presence of God. Like Parker, Carpenter saw Christianity as something distinct from the creeds and practices connected with it. This meant an acknowledgement, overt in

Carpenter's case, of the value of other religions as indicators of the movement of human communities towards a full revelation of God.

James Martineau (1805-1900)

During his three years as a student at Manchester New College Carpenter was deeply impressed by Martineau who was a member of the College staff at that time. Martineau was certainly no promoter of Comparative Religion. In a paradoxical sense, however, Martineau had a deep influence upon Unitarian thinking. He moved its theological stance towards a more liberal position and this was one of those elements directing Carpenter towards a study of the world's religions. Martineau's influence upon the Unitarian movement was enormous. In the early half of the nineteenth century Unitarianism was a deeply scriptural denomination. It rejected many of the classical Christian doctrines because no scriptural support for them could be found. The Unitarianism of Martineau's early days was deeply scriptural and dogmatic. He had, as a young man, been a keen disciple of Priestley, believing in a divine revelation through Christ, a revelation guaranteed through prophecy and miracle.

Martineau's early attitude to the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures can be summed up in a statement he gave at the induction service for his first ministry in Dublin in 1828. "Every Minister of Religion is the servant of Revelation, appointed to expound its doctrines, to enforce its precepts, and to proclaim its sanctions". He also said, "The successive revelations of God's will to mankind I believe to be contained in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures" (Martineau, 1828, pp.55-56). Jesus was referred to by Martineau as "mediator between God and man" and "commissioned delegate of Heaven on whom the Spirit was poured without measure...in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead" (Martineau, 1828, pp.55-56).

In a series of lectures first published in 1836, however, a notable change could be witnessed in Martineau's approach. In his *The Rationale of Religious Enquiry*,

reprinted many times, he said that reason was superior to all else, that even the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures were to be subject to it.

The question is intricate; but I will endeavour to make it clear, that no apparent inspiration whatever can establish any thing contrary to reason; that reason is the ultimate appeal, the supreme tribunal, to the test of which even scripture must be brought (Martineau, 1853a, p.62).

This change in Martineau's position was reflected in the movement as a whole, though not without some inner turmoil. Samuel Bache (1804-1876), for example, a prominent minister serving Priestley's former congregation in Birmingham, took the opposite line to Martineau. He sought a more closely defined list of principles for the Unitarian movement, with a dependence on traditional scriptural bases. His attempts to write such principles into the constitution of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association were, however, unsuccessful (Gordon, 1970, p.49).

The justification for Martineau's new position was that it was not a break with the past but a reinterpretation of orthodox teaching, a re-establishment of what was considered the essential truth of Christianity. Traditional doctrines were denied, not because of their unscriptural foundation, but because even the writers of the Christian Scriptures were subjected to the test of reason and conscience.

As Unitarianism had now been denied the traditional authority of the Scriptures there was a yearning for a substitute philosophy to fill the vacuum. This came with the publication of *A Study of Religion* (Martineau, 1900). In it Martineau sought to create a religious system based upon reason and conscience without drawing directly on the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. It was free philosophical thinking, which resulted in a belief in a personal God, in a divine demand for ethical living, and immortality of the soul. Martineau's view was that, though the historic religious authorities had been swept away, the religion of reason and conscience produced what the Scriptures and the

historic creeds had originally sought to express. Martineau continually expressed his view that there was an underlying truth to be found in all forms of Christianity, though it had been obscured by human-made creeds.

The shift in thinking within Unitarianism, under the influence of Martineau, was radical. Unitarianism distanced itself from all other forms of Christianity. In his *The Seat of Authority in Religion*, Martineau had denounced the Christian churches for highlighting the transient mythology at the expense of underlying truths.

Christianity, as defined and understood in all the Churches which formulate it, has been mainly evolved from what is transient and perishable in its sources (1890, p.650).

He went on to list all the doctrines he believed hid the essential truths of the Gospel. These included, amongst others, original sin, expiatory redemption, the Incarnation and the Second Coming. "All are the growth of a mythical literature, or Messianic dreams, or Pharisaic theology, or sacramental superstition, or popular apotheosis" (1890, p.650). This break with orthodoxy was far-reaching and uncompromising. Unitarianism, under Martineau's influence, though some inner agitation within the movement continued, was now a religion no longer dependent on the authority of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. It was a religion determined by reason and conscience that claimed to assert the teachings of Jesus. Jesus was considered the example of how humanity should live. Belief in God and immortality of the soul was more or less universal. Unitarianism no longer sought to prove that the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures had been wrongly interpreted. This was not necessary. Instead it sought to prove the truth of the teachings of Jesus by reference to a human inner judge.

Carpenter followed in Martineau's footsteps in that he similarly strove to introduce into theological consideration something of that enlightened reason. Carpenter took an extra step, however, by further loosening the ties that Unitarianism had with mainstream Christianity. The change of authority that Martineau promoted did not

involve any break with the past. It was a reinterpretation of orthodoxy that resulted from the change, not a repudiation of the whole teaching of orthodoxy. Carpenter was certainly inspired to use his enlightened conscience but went much further than Martineau by considering with sympathy the comparative approach to the study of religion. It should be noted that Martineau had not had the contacts with Eastern religion that the Carpenter family had enjoyed. Martineau was also deeply influenced by a circle of friends whose agenda was a direct contrast to that of Carpenter. Including Philip Henry Wicksteed (1844-1927), John James Tayler (1797-1869) and John Hamilton Thom (1808-1894), this group was committed to a renewed devotion to the person and work of Christ and the creation of a more spiritual faith. They looked for inspiration, not to the religions of the East, but to the work of the German biblical critics (Wicksteed, 1886, p.xi).

Unitarianism beyond Martineau

It is true to say that nineteenth century Unitarians had no doubt about their position as being genuinely Christian. There was within the movement, however, a more radical position even than that inspired by Martineau. For some, Jesus was no more than a product of his age and country, and subject to the same limitations of human nature. What set him apart was the superior morality he practised and taught. There were Unitarians whose theology was broader and more inclusive than that of Martineau. Francis Newman, referred to in Chapter 1, was an opponent of all branches of Christianity. He became a Unitarian when he felt that his denial of the revealed character of the Christian Scriptures and the necessity of a mediator were sentiments welcomed in Unitarianism. The inspiration for his joining was a confession of faith written for use in the Clerkenwell Unitarian Church. This document was included as an appendix to the written version of a sermon explaining the reasons for Newman's admission into the Unitarian fold.

Faith in an infinitely perfect God is all our Theology. The Universe is our Divine Revelation. The Manifestations of Nature and the Devotional Literature of all Times and peoples are our Bible. The goodness incarnated in humanity is our Christ. Every guide and helper is our Saviour. Increasing personal holiness is our salvation. The normal wonders of Nature are our Miracles. Love to God and love to man – piety and morality – are our only sacraments (Dean, 1875, p.1).

Other Unitarians professed an idealistic pantheism inspired by Herbert Spencer (1820-1904). They saw in God a mysterious power working for the realisation of order and justice. Others saw the object of religion as the realisation of the human ideal, this ideal being divinised in order to render it available for reverence and worship. It has to be said, however, that such ideas represented only a minority of Unitarian opinion.

By the middle of the nineteenth century Unitarianism as a whole had still not lost touch with its Christian roots. On the contrary, Unitarians were arguing that Christianity had been renewed and reconstructed by eschewing the supernatural nature of the Scriptures and the claims of orthodox Christianity. By treating the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures simply as valuable literature such Unitarians were nonetheless claiming that they were a valuable source of inspiration. Jesus too, no longer a divine mediator between God and humanity, was regarded as an extraordinary exemplar of what human behaviour should and could be like. This was a view put forward by a prominent Unitarian preacher of the time, Richard Acland Armstrong (1843-1905), whose sermon on this subject was delivered and debated by the Western Christian Union in 1883.

We no longer call the Bible a supernatural Revelation, or give it any official or miraculously authoritative position; but we like it, some of us love it; we do not any longer find it dull,

and we find that there is a well of pure waters in it, refreshing us to eternal life. And the Christ...we can take this man for our type and model of the loveliest and noblest humanity has ever been; and we can love him with all our heart and soul
(Armstrong, 1883, p.3).

The Unitarian movement was at the very point of a rapidly changing theological position. Unitarians had become accustomed to the habit of experimentation and theological challenge. Theological speculations were considered as individual credos rather than as affirmations owned by the denomination as a whole. There were no longer the same certainties that scriptural Unitarianism implied. The philosophical basis of Unitarian Christianity was in great flux and the tendency to explore and experiment was implicit. On the other hand, there were Unitarians who, though clearly of the "liberal" wing, came to the conclusion that Christianity, if denuded of unnecessary doctrines, could manifest itself as the highest form of religious expression. Such Unitarians tended to be greatly involved in Biblical criticism. This is true, for example, of Wicksteed, Carpenter's friend and contemporary, who translated into English the major works in European Biblical criticism of Kuenen at the University of Leyden.

As will be seen, Carpenter took more or less the same view. His work on Biblical criticism was part of his programme to improve the understanding of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures in order to claim an important place for them. Exploration and experimentation was of tremendous value but not as a means of rejecting the basics of Christianity. For Carpenter, Christianity was the religion that was the foundation for the purer religion yet to be manifested. As will be seen in Chapter 3, Carpenter's Christianity was deeply affected by how he understood the notion of evolution. Christianity, in his view, was a later stage of evolution, and Unitarian Christianity specifically, the most advanced stage.

Carpenter's Theology

Carpenter's theological views were clearly expressed in his writings. He devoted a good deal of his time to producing articles that were specifically concerned with Christology. In "Did Jesus Claim to be the Messiah" (1891) he analysed the reasons for reassessing the status of Jesus, suggesting that Jesus never associated himself with Jewish messiahship. In "The Jesus of the Gospels and the Jesus of History" (1907c) he sought to differentiate the ideas of the Church from what he considered as the simplicity of the gospel message. "Jesus or Christ?" (1909b) made the case for the humanitarian view of Jesus. Further doctrinal debate was found in a number of Carpenter's works. In *The Education of the Religious Imagination* (1898a), *Christianity in the Light of Historical Science* (1905b), and *Christianity in the Light of Christian Experience* (1906c) he argued for a liberalisation of Christian theology in order to allow for the use of reason. It was often through the medium of Carpenter's published sermons that he was able to deal with such doctrinal issues.

Most of Carpenter's theological beliefs, however, were expressed when comparing Christian teachings with those of other religions. Carpenter's own theological position, though formulated under the influence of the Unitarian ethos of his day, was strengthened and systematised in his encounter with other religions. In a very positive way one can witness Carpenter's justification for the primacy of Christian teachings by his reference to the doctrines of the East. Carpenter's work in *Comparative Religion*, then, was what fed his Christianity and the confidence he had in his own Christian position was determined by his understanding of other religions.

Carpenter's theology was not static, and, as his career developed, different emphases and different interests affected the character of his Christian theology. Three roughly identifiable periods present themselves. The early period in Carpenter's theological writings, when his academic career was in its formative stage, covers the

time of his first publications until about 1905. This period can best be characterised by his identification of Christianity as an experience, a sentiment, or a culture rather than as a fixed doctrinal position. His major fields of interest were issues regarding scriptural authority, the doctrine of the Incarnation, and ideas on divine retribution. There was work on other religions, though this was mainly in the form of histories of the religions rather than comparative study of them. These include, for example, *Three Ways of Salvation* (1884a) and "The Most Virtuous King: a Buddhist Birth Story" (1886a). There were also works of translation, such as the *Sumangala-Vilasini* (1886b). It is important to note, however, that such complex work of translation does indicate just how far Carpenter was involved in the study of Comparative Religion, even at this early stage in his working life.

Carpenter's second period, from 1905 to 1911, saw a refinement in his Christian theology, as is detailed in works of his such as *Christianity in the Light of Historical Science* (1905b), *Christianity in the Light of Christian Experience* (1906c), *Jesus or Christ?* (1909b), and *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World* (1911b). At this time he sought to devise a more clearly defined Christology. He also began to publish popular works on Comparative Religion and to demonstrate a greater concern for the implications of the study of other religions. "How Japanese Buddhism Appeals to a Christian Theist" (1906a) and "Religion in the Far East, or Salvation by Faith: a Study in Japanese Buddhism" (1910a and 1910b) both come out of this period.

Carpenter's third period, from 1911 until his death in 1924, though little concerned with the details of his Christian theology, nevertheless evidenced a reassertion of his belief in the primacy of Christianity. Fields of interest identified at this time include an exploration of what was meant for Carpenter by the notion of the Kingdom of God, a reflection on the meaning of suffering, and an affirmation on the supremacy of reason. This was also the period of a more sustained interest in other religions and production of work that delved more deeply into genuinely comparative

studies of religion. “Aspects of Theism in Hinduism and Judaism” (1917) and *Theism in Medieval India* (1921b) are products of this period. The latter, being a detailed and sustained examination of the development of Hinduism and Buddhism over many centuries, is indicative of the important place that Comparative Religion held in Carpenter’s work even at such a late stage in his career.

The Early Period

In the early period, from 1869 to about 1905, Carpenter used traditional Christian language and referred to traditional Christian emphases. A trait of his work, however, was the way he re-interpreted doctrines to reflect his own understanding of Christian values.

Amongst Carpenter’s earliest writings can be found a tremendous interest in Biblical Studies. Over thirty writings on Biblical Studies were published in this period, from Sunday School lessons to serious attempts at Biblical criticism. What is common to these writings is Carpenter’s concern to uphold some kind of authoritative status of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. In common with the Unitarians of the “liberal” school, and in the tradition of Martineau and others, Carpenter supported a position that looked for justification beyond the books of scripture themselves. Biblical authority, for Carpenter, was dependent upon the congeniality of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures to the modern mind. The position of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures was determined by an inner justification. They detailed an exploration of the human search for God and were valuable because they spoke to the human condition. Carpenter did not look to the resolutions of the early Councils of the Church, or to any concept of canonical authority. He believed that the strength of scriptural claims lay in the effectiveness of the material therein to move individual hearts and minds.

In this early period, Carpenter’s biblical studies did have an implication for his work in Comparative Religion. In Carpenter’s view, any literature from any source

could be identified as having the power that the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures had. Carpenter made this claim in an early lecture that he delivered in the spring of 1881. In that lecture he referred to what he called the “Greater Bible of the human race” (1881a, p.157), his expression for the collected religious writings of all the world’s great religions. He showed how different religious cultures had produced writings that marked the journey of the human race towards meaning and virtue. These writings dealt with the same concerns as those in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. They told similar stories in similar ways. Their teachings were often similar. Many of them were far more ancient than even the oldest of the Hebrew documents. The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures formed, said Carpenter, just one section of this greater spiritual library.

If the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures were the recorded experience of just one section of humanity then Carpenter had to do more to justify their position as being in some way particularly authoritative. Though he indicated the parallel experiences of different cultures in their religious explorations, he set the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures apart as having an additional dimension. All the great religious writings, he believed, shared the same values, but only the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures provided clear and unambiguous evidence of a divine hand displaying righteousness and justice.

Through all the varied phases of this literature, in its legend and romance, as in its devotion, its wisdom and philosophy, are the stern marks of a righteousness surpassing man’s, claiming his obedience, and ever setting before him something better than his best. In no other literature are these marks so clear and strong (1881a, p.161).

Carpenter admired the noble values of classical literature and the strivings after perfection detailed in the literature of other religions. In his view, however, they all failed to quicken an inward perception of God in the way the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures did. The material of the latter, said Carpenter, was poetry rather than science

or ethics. Their stories elicited in the reader an awareness of the reality of the spiritual dimension that could be conveyed in no other way. Carpenter admitted that there was little more he could offer to justify the supreme position of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The final test of their authority was private judgment.

It is not a choice between the Church, the Bible, *and* private judgment. The ascription of final authority to the Church or to the Bible is itself an act of private judgment, which stands before us, not as an alternative basis of faith, but as the inevitable preliminary of every act of belief (1881a, pp.175-176).

The strength of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures for Carpenter was their ability to be re-interpreted and re-assessed for each generation (1881a, p.178). The gathering together and editing of the material was done by a uniquely flexible approach with elements continually being added and different writers being acknowledged. According to Carpenter, the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures were a collection of devotional material expressing the feelings of a community (1890e, p.381). Their strength lay in their ability to speak with a natural authority to succeeding generations.

It was a work of piety to expand its contents as fresh elements appeared, or to combine them in new forms, and modify them for unexpected needs (1890e, pp.381-382).

Carpenter's view on the non-exclusiveness of scriptural material was replicated in his writings on the authority of Jesus. From an early point in his career Carpenter spoke of the Incarnation in non-exclusive terms. He continued to use the term but gave it a universal application by using it to refer to God's presence in humanity in general.

If inspiration be a worldwide process, unconfined by specific limits of one people or one book, may the same be said of the idea of incarnation? (1893b, p.848).

This idea was an advance on Martineau's statement in the second of his famous *Essays, Reviews and Addresses*, "The Incarnation is true, not of Christ exclusively, but of Man universally, and God everlastingly" (Martineau, 1891, p. 83). Martineau was referring to the general notion of the presence of God within all humanity. He had not fully considered the implications of his statement; he had not considered the idea of incarnation in the sacred writings of other religions. Martineau was never involved in any way in Comparative Religion. Carpenter, however, sought to exemplify his belief in a universal incarnation by seeking instances of God's commissioning of "divine human beings" in other cultures. For Carpenter the purpose of the Incarnation was to reveal God. Other religions also had their individuals who, by their teachings and their example, had sought to reveal God. Jesus was a "divine human being" in that tradition and functioned, not as a God-person but as a mode of instruction.

Carpenter's understanding of the doctrine of the Incarnation was influenced by his knowledge of similar doctrines in other religious traditions. In the address he prepared for the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions (1893b) he compared with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation a similar religious concept in two other traditions. He used the story of the Mexican Quetzalcoatl as a parallel to the story of Jesus. The former individual was born of a virgin, inaugurated a reign of peace, instituted beneficent laws, and suppressed war. Legends about Quetzalcoatl revolved around the idea of disclosing a higher life of wisdom and righteousness, "which is in truth an unveiling of heaven" (1893b, p. 848). Carpenter claimed this as a form of incarnation on the grounds that God's revelation could not be confined to one culture.

Similarly, Carpenter claimed to discover a form of incarnation in the Buddhist Pure Land tradition where, according to Carpenter, the Buddha was "the manifestation of the self-Existent Everlasting God" (1893b, p. 848). The difference between Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity was that the Buddha was repeatedly incarnated in his mother's womb at times when humanity strayed from the path of wisdom and

knowledge. The similarity for Carpenter was the aim of the Buddhist incarnation to seek to bring unto others a partaking of the Buddha nature. Carpenter felt that this was akin to the need for a partaking of the divine nature that was the goal of the Christian believer. One could find the evidence for this, he stated, in 2 Peter 1:4 (1893b, 849).

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (Authorised Version).

Carpenter's developed belief was not so much an incarnation into specific individuals in a number of religious cultures, but a presence of the Godhead in every individual. He quoted the opinion of Justin who claimed that the Logos of God dwelt in Socrates as well as in Jesus.

Was its purpose or effect limited to those two? Is there not a sense in which it appears in all man? If there is a 'true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world', will not every man as he lives by the light, himself also show forth God? (1893b, p.849)

This belief in a universal incarnation naturally influenced Carpenter's understanding of the status of Jesus. This meant that Jesus derived his authority from the strength and effectiveness of his teaching rather than from a position of divine status. Carpenter's Christology, then, involved a very human individual who was nevertheless a key to the revelation of God to humanity. In his earliest works Carpenter argued little about the status of Jesus except to call upon the student to make use of the faculty of the imagination. For Carpenter, imagination was something as important and as powerful as reason. It was more than creative fantasy. It was the mindful consideration of possibilities created by "intellectual and moral tests" (1898a, p.59) and open to change by "intellectual activity or social advance" (1898a, p.76). It was not the same as reason

alone as it allowed for insight, something Carpenter considered as “a moral intuition which does not depend on reasoning” (1898a, p.70). Imagination, then, for Carpenter, was a sort of intellectual creative experimentation serving to deliver an idea in the mind that was reasonable and possible. By using this faculty one could not, he believed, hold to a traditional position regarding the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Imagination finds it difficult to think of Jesus of Nazareth as the same as the creator above...If imagination is not to be relinquished, then a re-interpretation of the person of Christ is needed (1898a, p.74).

In his writings a few years later Carpenter was more aggressively condemnatory of traditional Christian teachings on the status of Jesus. These will be considered later. In his early works, however, one can recognise the opportunity for a more universalistic approach to the other world religions in the less exclusive stance taken by Carpenter (1890d, p.180).

Although looking at different religions as if they were different aspects of the same religious awareness, Carpenter nonetheless considered himself a Christian. He used Christian terminology and sought to re-interpret Christian doctrines. This is apparent in the way he dealt with Christian concerns for the afterlife. Carpenter, like Martineau before him, was certain about the reality of continuance, believing that the immortality of the soul was an integral and vital element of religion. As indicated earlier in the chapter, Martineau's freethinking philosophy convinced him, rather than dissuaded him, of the reality of continuance. Carpenter's justification for his belief in immortality was its vindication, as he saw it, by the claims of evolution (1903c, p.119). What was distinctive about Carpenter was his reinterpretation of Christian terms and his idiosyncratic justification for their use.

Carpenter's use of the idea of divine retribution is an example of how he used traditional Christian ideas and gave them a meaning of his own. Firstly, Carpenter could

not accept any other notion than that of universal salvation. It was the only means he had of reconciling statements about God's love and justice. He acknowledged that divine righteousness meant, for most religions, a future of retribution on the guilty and compensation for innocent sufferers. For Carpenter, however, freedom from the ideas of the past and contemplation from the standpoint of reason meant a reassessment of that notion. A conditional salvation would be, he said, a frustration of God's purposes (1903c, p.143).

Secondly, the idea of retribution, as commonly understood, would lead to inequality, selfishness and vindictiveness as well as fear of God. Carpenter accepted that punishment of wrong was a moral principle, but he could not conceive of a God who was the vengeful judge figure implied in some religious traditions. Nonetheless, some kind of retribution appealed to his sense of justice. His response was to justify the idea of retribution by suggesting that the judgment was to be undertaken, not by God, but by the individual conscience. Individuals themselves would therefore determine their own destiny. He argued that rational minds would understand the reality of the righteousness they had violated and would positively desire suffering in order to enjoy healing and purgation (1903c, p.137).

Carpenter believed that virtue was its own reward and he was not comfortable with the idea that one should induce morality with rewards and punishment. He argued that recompense seemed to be needed to reward righteousness, and especially to reward suffering. He did not believe, however, that it was God who was directly involved in the assessment of individual character. After death individuals would judge themselves and would seek their own spiritual growth. Reconciliation with God, he believed, was not effected by changes brought from outside but by victories of the soul initiated from within oneself. The condition of one's existence beyond the grave, therefore, was dependent upon one's own efforts towards moral progress.

Carpenter's approach to the afterlife involved an unusual interpretation of the divine demand for retribution but this was characteristic of the way in which Carpenter sought to be inclusive whilst still holding to Christian principles. It gave him a freedom that allowed for a sympathetic acknowledgement of beliefs on the afterlife taught by other religions.

The Middle Period

In the second period under consideration, the period between 1905 and 1911, Carpenter produced a great deal of written material. His works covered a number of different fields, including ecclesiastical history (1905a; 1911g), social affairs (1911e), and biography (1905c), as well as a number of works on Comparative Religion and Biblical Studies. There was revealed at this time, however, more substance to his Christian theology. In these works his Christian theology took on a more coherent shape. As he became more involved in the study of other religions and the expounding of their beliefs he also involved himself more in refining his Christian position.

In this middle period Carpenter concentrated on a clear definition of his Christology. It involved a more vigorous argument against the traditional Christian position on the status of Jesus. It favoured the concept of a "messiah" whose role was determined by the quality and relevance of his teachings. He also more clearly identified himself with Christianity as a major force for social and ethical change.

It is undeniable that Carpenter still considered Jesus the focus of the Christian religion. Because of the strength of his personality alone Carpenter felt that Jesus had justified his position as a character of eminence. "The Jesus of history still holds the key for the welfare and the happiness of his race" (1907c, p.148). In this period, however, he produced a lot of material to dissociate his views on the position of Jesus from those upheld by most other Christian writers. Carpenter made a clear distinction between the historical Jesus and the christological conception of the theologians. Carpenter was

dismissive of what he called “the Christ of the Creeds and of the Church” (1907c, p.106).

Carpenter’s justification for the teaching of a human Jesus was to be found, he said, within the historical records of the Christian Scriptures themselves. He did not deny that Jesus claimed a belief in miracles and demonic possession. This did not mean that miracles and demonic possession were a feature of life in the times in which Jesus lived, only that people at that time believed that they were.

Carpenter affirmed most strongly that Jesus was human and that the strength of his teachings depended on that fact. That Jesus believed in miracles and demonic possession was due, he said, to the beliefs of the times. Jesus was not perfect, he did not have access to nineteenth century knowledge and understandings, and he would have been susceptible to all the superstitions around in the ancient Middle East. Jesus was veiled, said Carpenter, by “the haze of later legends and by the limitations and beliefs of his age” (1907c, p.134). “Jesus was a man, a son of his country, of his age, and race” (1907c, p.136).

In his article, “The Jesus of the Gospels and the Jesus of History” (1907c), Carpenter compared the sayings of Jesus himself, as reported in the gospel accounts, with statements appearing in official Church documents. For Carpenter, there was no doubt that two different individuals were thus revealed. The declaration that Jesus was the only Son of God, as stated in the Apostles Creed, was contrasted with the words of Jesus when God was referred to as “our father” or “your father”. The words of the Nicene Creed stating that Jesus was “very God of very God” were contrasted with the words of Jesus on the cross asking why God had forsaken him. The Christ of the Athanasian Creed, “Perfect God and Perfect Man”, was contrasted with the assertion by Jesus that he was not “good”, that only God the Father was good.

The way that Carpenter’s knowledge of other religions fed into his Christianity is evident in his assertions of Jesus’s humanity. He claimed, for example, that there was

no justification for the sinlessness of Jesus. He argued that this was a result of speculation rather than fact and that speculations of this kind were common to all cultures. He cited belief in Jesus's sinlessness as an example of the human tendency to idealise the founder of their religions. This was evident, said Carpenter, in Western cultures just as much as in those of the East. As there was no evidence for such claims, Carpenter had no hesitation in rejecting them.

On the other hand, Carpenter upheld Jesus as a major revealer of God's justice. He did this by undermining the traditional interpretation of Jesus as an object of worship. This was something, he believed, that Jesus himself could never have initiated (1907c, p.130). He sought to show how this was typical of all believing communities, and that Christianity was part of that same current of speculation and mystery. Carpenter's agenda involved a rejection of that tradition in order to reveal Jesus as a teacher of values and truths that would have authority based upon their own merit. The greatest characteristic of Jesus, according to Carpenter, was that he had no objective authority at all, but that he taught the supremacy of individual human authority.

In returning to the historical Jesus we do not return to a supreme and absolute authority. We cannot escape the responsibility which he lays on us, to judge ourselves what is right (1907c, 146).

Carpenter was willing to attack the most fundamental points of traditional Christian teaching about Jesus in order to liberate his teachings from being enshackled to any one culture. He believed that in standing alone and free they would appeal to the rational mind. This therefore gave them a greater authority. He argued that the identification of Jesus with the Logos was a false one. The Logos, he said, was a concept devised by human beings and bore no connection to the ministry of Jesus. He suggested that it was an interpretation of the role of Jesus by a follower rather than the word of

Jesus himself. The Gospel account of this role was a “free reproduction” of his words and ministry.

It is the attempt to present his life and work through the medium of a representation adopted from a different lineage of thought, and intelligible to a fresh order of minds (1907c, p.124).

According to Carpenter, the teachings of Jesus were hidden by the creation of the Church, an institution founded, he said, by St. Paul. The Church had given the teachings of Jesus a different status by focusing on his person instead and basing true discipleship upon later credal formulations. Thus, the Church, contrary to the wishes of Jesus, had become exclusive and narrow-focused (1905b, p.4). In *The Jesus of the Gospels and the Jesus of History* (1907c), Carpenter vehemently castigated the Church for creating an artificial Jesus that bore no resemblance to the genuine Jesus of history. The Church had created a Christ who was not really human, but was more of a philosophical concept. Jesus had become a figure conjured up by the mind rather than a real, living, breathing and passionate human being who cared for his people. What that real person was replaced with was “that strange ideal construction against which the words of the real Jesus appeal, but so often appeal in vain” (1907c, p.107). The Church had also created a Christ who was the head of a complex hierarchy, rather than the creator of a fellowship of equal rights, and was represented by potentates and princes of an ecclesiastical order that restricted membership to those who underwent certain rituals. This was a contrast to the communion that welcomed those desiring simply to follow basic precepts (1907c, p.109).

For Carpenter, the historical Jesus was not a “theological conception” but “a living human experience” (1910d, p.13). His status was justified by what he taught rather than who he was. In the light of the teachings of other religions, however, and influenced by his adherence to the idea of evolution, the position of Jesus, as Carpenter

saw it, was not the ultimate. Christianity was only the latest phase in religious development.

But neither philosophy, nor science, as I understand them,
permits us to ascribe finality to any single person, or to any
specific body of truths (1905b, p.8).

What was most important for Carpenter was that Jesus was a teacher. The teachings that Carpenter felt were the most significant were those connected with ethical and social values. Jesus was “the Christ of the individual conscience and affection” that led people to see themselves as members of one human family (1907c, p.111).

According to Carpenter it was the teachings of Jesus that resulted in the creation of democracy. He believed that the principles of democratic government were based upon the teaching of Jesus on human equality and human relationships. Carpenter even suggested that the guiding objects of the French Revolution “liberty, equality, fraternity” were Christian values restated to speak to particular social conditions (1907c, p.114).

In The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World (1911b)

Carpenter argued once again that there was a significant difference between the creeds of the church and the teachings of Jesus. He described Christianity as a type of spiritual life that had many different aspects but amongst which two stood out as being particularly significant. “It is intensely ethical, and it is profoundly social” (1911b, p.108). He suggested that a study of early Christian communities would reveal that their lives were ruled by a passion for ethical guidelines. These, said Carpenter, were built upon the central foundations of Christianity as taught by Jesus himself. “This must be carried back to the original impulse of Jesus” (1911b, p.109).

The Later Period

In the third period of Carpenter’s writings, those produced from 1912 to his death in 1927, there was a less aggressive denial of the formulations of traditional

Christianity. There is no evidence to suggest that he changed his mind but he had already made clear his theological position. His later writings tended to display a more reflective tone. It is as if, having acquired confidence that his readership understood his interpretations of Christian doctrines, he now no longer felt the need to detail his approach to Christian teachings in such a forceful way. In his later years, Carpenter made use of traditional Christian terminology but he did not spend much effort in defining it. He did, nonetheless, continue to uphold liberal Christianity as the most advanced manifestation of religious experience.

Carpenter's later writings made use of the concept of the coming of the Kingdom of God, a concept derived from Judaism, which, Carpenter felt, still had relevance and meaning for the modern world (1917, p.390). He admitted that the modern mind "revolts" at the idea of a real person descending from the sky in order to usher in a period of righteousness (1924a, p.57). He did, nonetheless, laud Jewish eschatological teachings that involved a coming rule of righteousness. He believed that Christianity built upon that basic idea the notion that humanity had a distinctive role in co-operating with God in bringing about the new age. For Carpenter, the Kingdom of God was not a gift of grace wholly in the hands of God. Instead, it was the realm of ideal human relations on earth, a sort of ideal Christian community. Carpenter's major themes were the creation of ethical values, human development, and evolution. To Carpenter, these elements gave substance to the notion of the Kingdom of God. The response of the Christian to the teachings of Jesus, said Carpenter, was to set about working for human progress and to create a society based upon the moral values taught by Jesus. This was what the Kingdom of God meant. It was a change that would inevitably come about for he believed that the values inherent in it were so strong as to be undeniable.

Carpenter's later writings dealt very little with specific Christian ideas. He published several sermons together with a number of short essays on historical issues. He focused most of the writings on world religions, and this period, for example, saw

the publication of the voluminous collection of essays, *Theism in Medieval India* (1921b). There were major articles, nonetheless, on astrology in Revelation (1925b), the Hermetica (1927c) and the Johannine writings (1927d). Comment on Christian teachings was confined mainly to statements where Christian ideas were compared with those of other religions. Thus, in an article comparing Buddhism with Christianity, Carpenter praised the practical nature of Christianity (1924a, p.58), arguing for a religion that calls its adherents to work within the world for change. At the same time, he committed himself to a belief in the reality and necessity of a future life (1924a, p.59) though he did not feel able to define clearly what that meant.

In this period, Carpenter was also concerned with the problem of suffering. This began with his reflections on the needless agonies of the Great War (1916a) experienced by whole communities and continued with his thoughts on the reality of personal suffering. Carpenter did not believe in suffering as a condition of the Christian life. It was an inevitable part of what it meant to be human and one's personal response called for self-surrender to God (1924a, p.62). What was vital for Carpenter in the Christian character was not suffering, but service, and service was joyous. His series of sermons given in New York was focused on the need for human beings to create a sense of fellowship within which suffering would become less intolerable and through which meaning could be created (1918).

In the tradition of the Unitarians of the "liberal" school, Carpenter claimed the supremacy of reason as a major factor in determining where religious belief was to be located (1925a, p.7). In his introduction to *Freedom and Truth*, citing Martineau's influence, he argued that the last appeal in the search for religious truth must be to the judgement of the human mind. Even the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, he said, were dependent upon the light of reason (1925a, p.7). Though he asserted that the doctrine of the Atonement was to be found at the heart of Christianity (1924a, p.202), he did not

believe in a metaphysical transaction accomplished by Jesus through his death but in an atonement through human reasoning and endeavour.

In his later writings Carpenter was more willing to assert his Christian credentials. He did not wish to be an impartial commentator on the world's religions. His approach was always to recognise within the teachings of other religions those elements that he believed to evidence a developing awareness of God's presence. Christianity was the most advanced religion and therefore there was the constant need to state the depth of his commitment to the Christian tradition.

An Appraisal

Carpenter's theology was a product of various influences. Born into an age when scriptural Unitarianism still had its adherents, he looked to the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures for the material from which to build a coherent liberal Christianity. It must be remembered that he was a Biblical scholar as well as a teacher of Comparative Religion, and that he continued his interest in Biblical Studies until his death. Even his last known publication was connected with Biblical Studies (1927d). The "liberal" school of Unitarianism that sought a theology dependent upon individual reason and conscience also influenced him, however. These two influences, together with insights gained from other world religions, affected the theology espoused by Carpenter.

The Authority of Scripture

Because Carpenter's theology developed in a period of upheaval in Unitarianism, the conflicting influences often meant that his assertions were difficult to uphold. Carpenter sought to expound his liberal Christianity despite this. Nevertheless, he found it very difficult to justify the elevated position of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. In his earliest works he set apart the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as

containing a powerful element not found elsewhere and which therefore made them superior (1881a, p.161). This was the recognisable presence of God expressing a form of righteousness beyond human creation. The sacred writings of other cultures bore something of that divine presence, said Carpenter, but it was only evidenced clearly in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

The cosmogony of Genesis may be no truer to science than that of the Greek Hesiod, but its hymn of light and life still awakens us to the everlasting freshness of the creative power of the universe (1881a, p.161).

The authority of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, said Carpenter, was determined by the collective witness to its teachings by many generations (1881a, p.178).

Carpenter's continual claim was that, comparing the merits of the world's scriptures, the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures would stand out as being of superior character (1909b, p.247). He was unclear, however, exactly which criteria to use in order to make this kind of judgment. He felt that a distinct ethical system was evident in the Christian Scriptures that was not evident elsewhere. Carpenter, however, could not develop his argument. His only justification was the conclusions of private judgment (1907c, p.146). What Carpenter failed to do was to admit that his perception of the superiority of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures was determined by the fact that they belonged to the religious community in which he had been raised and within which he worked. Thus, despite his knowledge of the world's great religious writings, he continued to uphold the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as the epitome of religious wisdom. The writings of other religions, then, were considered as products of religion at an earlier stage of evolution.

Carpenter's view of the Christian Scriptures was that they had an inner authority derived from their ability to speak to human needs and to reveal a distinctive awareness of God's presence. They had relevance for him because of this congeniality rather than

because of an external authoritative status conferred upon them. This had consequences for the consideration of the sacred writings of other religions. He tended to treat them as if their relationship to their respective religions was the same as that of the Christian Scriptures with regard to Christianity. In other words, he believed them to be authoritative owing to the imposition of that status by official sources.

Carpenter was critical of the opinion that suggested that God spoke directly and unambiguously through the written word. When writing about the Hindu written texts, Carpenter gave the impression that they were considered similarly authoritative (1911b, pp.44-45; 1921b, p.359). The difficulty with Carpenter's terminology is that it gave a false impression of the character and authority of the Hindu writings. There are authoritative texts but there is a wide variety of positions on their status. Different texts have authority for different groups within Hinduism. There is no one agreed position or official canon.

Carpenter came much closer to understanding the status of texts in the case of Islam and the Qur'an. He recognised that the Qur'an was authoritative in the institutional sense. He acknowledged that the Muslims believed it to be of divine origin (1913b, pp.12-13). In his view this was very different to the liberal Christian position. According to Carpenter, the Christian Scriptures were merely devotional addresses.

The Authority of Jesus

Carpenter's works on the authority of Jesus also witness to a problem for Carpenter. This was the problem as to what kind of status to award Jesus. This problem was not unusual for Unitarians of his era as there had been a gradual move from a Socinian or Arian position in which Jesus was considered as a divine creature, not God by nature, but an instrument of God for the creation of the world. This change of direction led to a vigorous debate on the status of Jesus. Pan-religionism, a belief in the equal validity of all religious expression, was a view within Unitarianism that was not

yet in full sway in English Unitarian circles. It was also only to develop fully after Carpenter's career had ended. Most Unitarians still tended to affirm the supreme authority of Jesus as the ultimate revealer upon earth of God's presence. At this time what that meant in real terms was still a matter for much argument. Carpenter was part of that environment and his position is sometimes unclear. He referred to Jesus in terms of his being someone quite clearly special, yet at other times he seems to have suggested that Jesus was not unique. As has already been quoted, "in returning to the historical Jesus we do not return to a supreme and absolute authority" (1907c, p.146). Carpenter's justification for the supremacy of Jesus over other historical characters was human judgment. If applied equally to all religious teachers, he believed, then Jesus would stand out above the rest. "Jesus of Nazareth will find his place as the loftiest leader among the children of men" (1909b, p.247).

The problem with Carpenter's position is that he was unclear as to how, if one applied private judgment, all could expect to come to the same conclusions. He did not specify which of Jesus's teachings underlined his moral authority and made him distinctive. He upheld the uniqueness of Jesus without fully identifying the marks of that uniqueness. His attachment to the Christian culture was an emotional one and a historic one although it was in some ways representative of late nineteenth century Unitarianism.

Differences Between the Religions

Carpenter's method was problematic, as it tended to minimise the differences between the religions. By focusing on what was essential to Christianity what was essential to another religion could be overlooked. The most significant aspects of any religion are not necessarily those Christianity considers as basic and essential. Thus, there is the opportunity for absorbing a false picture of other religions. For example, Rhys Davids, Carpenter's Pali teacher, cautioned against finding similarities in other religions by pointing out that, in Buddhism for example, the most instructive points are

those that differ greatly from Christianity (1898, pp.2-3). Max Müller, too, suggested that Christianity and Buddhism were at opposite poles regarding the essentials (1899, p.171).

Carpenter was familiar with the work of Rhys Davids and Max Müller and Carpenter himself acknowledged the danger of minimising the differences between the religions. He was very critical of those who drew unsubstantiated conclusions about other religions (1921b, p.264; 1906b, p.943). Despite this he did not always heed the warnings from Rhys Davids and Max Müller on this issue. Carpenter focused on other religions by first setting apart his own religious position. Carpenter was determined to demonstrate that Unitarian Christianity was something distinctive. This was a faith that recognised truth existing in all religions though it was liberal Christianity that was at the most advanced stage of evolution. Religion was still evolving and, unlike traditional Christianity, Carpenter's theology anticipated a moving forward to a time when there would be one world faith.

A major consequence of Carpenter's theology and its impact upon Comparative Religion is the way in which he treated other religions equally. In Carpenter's writings, the teachings of the other religions of the world were paralleled with major aspects of Christian theology. Carpenter discovered a communal experience (1916a, p.78) that led to his rejection of exclusiveness within Christianity. This meant that he could assert that no single religion had a right to claim finality. According to him, religious founders did not create systems of thought but they did "impart impulses of moral endeavour and spiritual affection which Christians call 'life'" (1906a, p.504).

Carpenter's stress on appealing to the rational mind and dependence upon private judgment suggested that one should approach all religions with the same open mind. His own position was shaped by experience and personal faith. The pre-eminence of liberal Christianity was for him due to his own nurture in a liberal Christian environment and his personal experience. As he said in one of his essays, "And how can

a truth in life be stated? It can, indeed, only be felt in living". Also, "Jesus's meaning is often to be felt rather than stated, comprehended by sympathy rather than expounded in words" (1907c, pp.142-143).

Conclusion

Carpenter's theology, then, was provisional and experiential. This meant that other religions could be approached from a position of openness and flexibility. It also meant that misleading elements gave a false impression of what was of major significance to the adherents of the religion being considered. The major consequences of Carpenter's theology for other religions will be evidenced in the next few chapters. Therein I will examine in further detail how Carpenter presented other religions to his readers. In the next chapter I shall assess how Carpenter understood the theory of evolution and how this affected his study of Comparative Religion.

CHAPTER 3

CARPENTER AND EVOLUTION

Introduction

In the previous chapter I dealt with Carpenter's form of Christianity and how it was a product of the development in Unitarian thinking in the nineteenth century. In this chapter I shall deal with the major guiding principle of Carpenter's thinking, that of evolution. Firstly, I shall consider the various ways in which Carpenter interpreted the theory of evolution and how these affected his Christian theology. Secondly, I shall deal with the criteria that Carpenter used to establish the evolutionary status of a religion.

Carpenter's Understanding of Evolution

In reflecting upon Carpenter's approach to other religions, in the light of his views concerning the primacy of Unitarian Christianity, it is important to consider how he made use of the theory of evolution. The use of the theory of evolution was central to Carpenter's method and his determination to make it fit his approach to Comparative Religion should not be underestimated.

The theory of evolution was very influential and very controversial during the Victorian years. Not only did it gain many supporters but it also galvanised those opposed to the dominance of the theory. Evolution was the intellectual climate of Carpenter's time. The work of several scholars had prepared the ground for Darwin's major contribution. These included Lamarck, Hutton and Lyell, three scholars mentioned early in Chapter 1. Lamarck's fundamental claim was that acquired characteristics were inherited. A biologist, he believed that physical characteristics were transmitted to the next generation of a species. Hutton, a geologist, was a precursor of

evolutionism in that he believed that the features of the earth could be explained by slow processes over time, a development known as “gradualism”. Lyell could also be thought of as an influence on Darwin with his “uniformitarianism”, an extension of Hutton’s gradualism that identified geological processes as uniform through time.

Important figures for the way in which Carpenter approached evolution were Georg Hegel (1770-1831) and, to a lesser degree, Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Hegel believed that all the religions of the world were stages of a developmental process at the end of which was “the Religion of Absolute Finality” (Chantepie de la Saussaye, 1887, p.3). For Hegel, God was behind all movement. The history of the world was the justification of God in history. All movement in history, said Hegel, was the purposeful design of God. Comte also posited stages of development through history that, if carefully observed, would reveal the pattern of growth in the future. This approach, and Hegel’s, was much closer to Carpenter’s view than Darwin’s or those of Darwin’s predecessors mentioned earlier. Carpenter’s belief that evolution manifested a divine plan, an idea explored later in this chapter, was certainly more akin to Hegel’s thinking than anything Darwin wrote.

Darwin’s approach to evolution built on the hypothesis formulated by scholars such as Lamarck that all living beings had the same origins. At the heart of his thesis was the theory of natural selection, that species have varied developmentally because of the action of two laws. The first was the universality of the struggle for life, guaranteeing the survival of the fittest, or, more specifically, those best adapted to the conditions of their environment. The second was the ability of all living things to transmit individual characteristics to the next generation. In Darwin’s thesis human beings were part of that developmental process.

By the time that Darwin wrote his *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), Carpenter was fifteen years of age and the following years saw a time of turmoil over the theory. In 1864, when Carpenter was twenty years of age, there was a

memorable debate at the Oxford meeting of the British Association when Thomas Huxley (1825-1895), championed the supremacy of biological science over revealed religion. Carpenter's father, at the same time a naturalist as well as a devout theist, had found no difficulty in reconciling his science with religion. He recognised evolution as a part of the divine scheme of creation. Carpenter himself was to share this attitude.

It was not only Carpenter's family's devotion to evolutionary theory that was all pervading, however. Evolutionary theory remained very popular throughout the rest of the century until by the 1890s it had become more an overwhelming atmosphere than a theory. Carpenter embraced evolution wholeheartedly but, as will be demonstrated, he had a distinctive interpretation of the theory. Carpenter did not so much expound the evolutionary theory, but instead used the theory for his own purposes. Evolution was a method of displaying his belief in the supremacy of liberal Christianity.

Evolution as Human Improvement

In his earliest writings, Carpenter showed little original thinking on evolution. He simply asserted that evolution was a means of understanding human improvement, particularly with regard to the apprehension of objective ethical values. Carpenter's first written exploration of evolution, though it was neither distinctive nor detailed, was an essay written in 1884, *Three Ways of Salvation*, an essay that was made more widely available in a collection published nineteen years later (1903c). In the essay he cited St. Augustine as an exponent of some kind of evolutionary progress. Carpenter argued that Augustine's work promoted the idea of evolution as human improvement. According to Carpenter, Augustine was able to identify clearly recognisable phases of evolution. These phases were connected with the development of the consciousness of certain human values. Thus, an early stage of evolution was humanity's acceptance of the need for laws by which society could create harmonious human relations. Another stage involved the recognition of prophecy with its demands for ethical transformation. The

next stage involved the more precise requirements of the holy life as proposed by the teachings of Jesus and recorded in the gospel accounts.

In Carpenter's view, Augustine taught that evolution was concerned with the gradual awareness of the full consequences of God's truths about human ethical behaviour and their practical application witnessed by human progress. Evidence for this, said Carpenter, was to be found in the "triumphs" of the Church that had rescued Christian teachings from being dispersed in the confusion of sectarian struggles. The Church's strength was that it allowed for human progress by transmitting "moral and spiritual impulses" that were capable of causing "vast social transformation" (1903c, p.216).

What is particularly noticeable about Carpenter's early works is that they expressed a certain optimism regarding the human condition. Evolution meant for him the ever-progressing improvement in human values. In an address delivered to the Opening of the Session at Manchester College in 1887, Carpenter expressed an assurance of human progress. Evolution meant a development of a newer and more accurate philosophy of human nature rescuing humanity from "the wreck of its abasement" (1887j, p.338). This development meant a stress on ethics and a focus upon the ethical elements of religion. According to Carpenter, salvation had now come to be identified as deliverance, not from future punishment, but from present sin. In this context, evolution was a way of defining that consciousness of human improvement that saw in history the teaching of "the rise and not the fall of man" (1887j, p.339).

Evolution as a Divine Plan

There was another way in which Carpenter interpreted the theory of evolution to fit his own agenda. It was from the 1890s that Carpenter began to refer to evolution as evidence of a clear divine plan for humankind although the argument was formulated more strongly and more coherently during the years of his Principalship of Manchester

College. Acknowledgement of evolution was, for Carpenter, recognition of a purposefulness within human history, the acceptance of an ultimate goal towards which humanity was journeying. According to Carpenter, it was impossible to determine the time of the end of that process, as it was equally impossible to determine when it had begun. The only certainty was that the forces of the present were rooted in the past, and that the future would be built by the energies of the present time. Life was thus continually adjusting to the conditions of change (1910d, p.3). Integral to that adjustment was a growing revelation of God (1890d, p.197) whilst the end, a far-off goal intended for all humanity (1911d, p.224), would be union with God in some blissful state.

Religion starts with trembling steps amid unknown terrors, and
advances on a slow and difficult way till it can lie peacefully
on the Father's breast (1910d, p.3).

At the same time as Carpenter began to speak of evolution as a divine plan he began also to equate evolution with Darwinism. Carpenter said that Darwin had built on speculations of earlier generations and broadened the areas where such speculations could be applied. It was because of Darwin, he thought, that evolution had become such a dominant theory (1910d, p.2). Whilst there were doctrines around of "progressive development", it was Darwin who "flung a bomb into the central citadel of orthodoxy" by expounding the doctrine of evolution (1925a, p.10). This association of evolution with Darwin may have implied that Carpenter was eschewing the belief in a divinity controlling events throughout history in order to come to terms with natural selection. Curiously, this is not the case. Carpenter was clear that evolution meant, for him, a means for the implementation of God's plan for humanity.

Carpenter asserted that it was possible to identify that divine plan by an examination of history and this is why he considered the study of religions to be important. He believed that they were representative of different stages in religious

understanding and that by examining them one could detect a progressive revelation of God's intention for humanity. Carpenter seemed to believe in clearly definable stages in the development of God's purposes. "Even the plan that was outgrown pointed the way to a nobler work" (1890d, p.199). He considered that the primal religions represented the earliest phases of evolution and that this was due to the basic nature of their belief systems. The gathering together of teachings based on reflections on human experience indicated a more developed religious position. Acknowledgement of this fact, according to Carpenter, was essential to the study of Comparative Religion.

Comparative religion rests on assumptions, chief of which is that there is a development of the more complex out of the simpler, of the higher and universal out of the lower and cruder (1894a, p.3).

To be recognised as an advanced religion, said Carpenter, there had to be an acknowledgement of the significance of history. There had to be evidence of a willingness to adapt to new understandings and forms of organisation. There had to be a promotion of personal and social ethical values. Carpenter believed that these elements had been agreed objectively by exponents of what he called "modern thought" (1898a, p.59). These were Biblical critics and evolutionists of the late Victorian period who used intellectual and moral tests to group and grade the religions.

The rejection of revelation, miracles and inspiration by Unitarian Christians also meant that they could be included as exponents of advanced religion. There were some religions that had progressed well enough to be defined according to these factors. Carpenter felt, however, that only Christianity scored sufficiently well on all points to qualify as the most advanced manifestation of religious understanding (1898a, p.59). Only Christianity, he felt, had been able to transform doctrine and polity sufficiently. Only Christianity had acknowledged the importance of history. Only Christianity bore "the intrinsic eminence of nobility" (1898a, p.59).

Carpenter explored the idea that evolution was evidence of a divine plan for humanity in his *The Place of Immortality in Religious Belief*, written in 1898 but published more widely several years later (1903c). In it he claimed that death was an integral part of the process of educating humanity for union with God. He believed that the human soul was capable of change and growth and that this was possible after death.

Carpenter became more convinced that evolution manifested a divine plan when he reflected upon what he considered as the orderliness of human development. He felt that there were clear lines of growth that were progressive stepping stones to God's revelation. He suggested that an examination of those religions considered closer to primal religion would reveal the same stages as those experienced by more advanced peoples. This meant that all historic aspects of religion were capable of "co-ordination". This is a claim he made in *A Century of Comparative Religion 1800-1900* (1900d, p.12) and in *The Place of Christianity Among the Religions of the World* where he claimed that Comte would agree to the same assertion (1911b, p.128). Carpenter projected this orderliness forward into the future. He thus assumed a progression towards the goal where separate development would fade away and there would be a coming together of peoples in the ultimate union with God. In his article on the Sikh religion, for example, he demonstrated how, in his view, the distinctiveness of that religion would be lost when it merged with other religions in a distant future.

With the gradual spread of the modern spirit the claims
of its Gurus will fade, and its truths will no longer stand
apart from pieties that are diffused all round the globe.
But its witness will then have done its work. (1911d,
p.224).

Evolution as Religious Merger

In Carpenter's writings on evolution there is a promotion of the idea of a future closeness of the religions. Religion in the future would be free of doctrine and would eschew aspects of past traditions. This would further evidence the purposefulness of human advancement, as the particularities of individual religions would become meaningless in the face of further revelations of God. Carpenter illustrated his views by showing how some forms of Hinduism had taken on certain characteristics that were akin to Western religion. Movements that abandoned the worship of images and had adopted social reform programmes were indicative of what Carpenter felt were evolutionary developments. In blunter tones he praised organisations such as the Brahmo Samaj for its attempts to "harmonise eastern and western ideals" (1912b, p.6).

Carpenter felt that the goal of religion, in Hindu terms, "the vision of the Eternal, with universal blessedness and everlasting joy" (1912b, p.2), was a worthy one. He did not wish Hindus to lose touch with their religious heritage. He believed, however, that Hinduism needed to lose something of its particularities in order to be better able to evolve. As will be identified later in the thesis, the doctrine of *karma* was, for Carpenter, a great stumbling block that prevented social reform. The Brahmo Samaj, ignoring the warnings about the dangerous incursion of Western culture into Asian philosophy, had the opportunity to present a different kind of Eastern religion. This would honour the Indian religious tradition whilst at the same time acknowledging advances in Western civilisation, politics and philosophy (1912b, p.5). This loss of their distinctiveness as an Indian movement was proof, Carpenter felt, of the growing merging of values and insights in the journey towards full divine disclosure.

Carpenter claimed that there was a growing awareness of similarities between the religions that demonstrated that, as religions advanced, they lost something of their cultural accretions. Religions were becoming aware of "a unity of religious

consciousness” or, to use a favourite phrase of Carpenter’s, “theologies may be many but religion is one” (1913b, p.34). Carpenter showed how all human groups followed the same pattern of worshipping deities derived from parental experience. All religions, he said, expressed their philosophies in threesomes. The ancient Egyptians worshipped the triad of Osiris, Isis and Horus. The Babylonian cosmology placed Anu in the heaven, Bel on the earth, and Ea in the ocean. Homer’s triad included Zeus the god of the sky, Poseidon the god of the earth and the sea, and Hades the god of the nether realm. Even Rome had its triad of Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus, or Jupiter, Juno and Minerva.

Carpenter recognised here, not merely several examples of coincidence, but parallel developments. Similarly, all gods were in some sense considered as “saviours”, and all great religious teachers somehow became manifestations of the Infinite (1913b, pp.108-128). Ultimately, he predicted, outmoded ritual and the mediatorial role of the priesthood would disappear (1914b, p.1). In their place, religion would advance towards a higher spirituality where worship would be a central and uniting feature and where a world of moral values would be acknowledged as a necessary goal (1914b, p.3).

In an article dealing with the idea of “salvation” in Buddhism Carpenter envisaged a time when all distinctions between revealed and natural religion would fade away and religious groups would drop their exclusive claims.

We see the whole progress of human thought slowly
advancing along divers paths towards clearer truth, and the
immense resources of the moral experiences of the race
converging on a common testimony (1913a, p.507).

Carpenter’s view of the future religion would be something involving the different religions rejecting their distinctive claims and benefiting from advances in philosophy, social awareness, and political development. This did not mean that he rejected the supremacy of Christianity in general or Unitarian Christianity in particular. An evolutionist, he acknowledged Unitarian Christianity as the most advanced form of

religious understanding as yet experienced. The future would be different and Unitarianism would be the vehicle for the merging of the world's religions once their distinctive claims had been dropped.

Evolution and Monotheism

Carpenter's distinctive approach to evolution as expressed in his later writings can be witnessed in his views on monotheism. Monotheism was integral for Carpenter as a feature of advanced religion. By application of the theory of evolution he was able to identify certain stages in the process of adopting monotheism. These began with a concern for the physical needs of a community and the response to the environment. As the human experience broadened and the connections with the land were loosened, speculation developed. The later stage of the human quest for knowledge of the ultimate was that which conceived of a god as "deliverer" based on personal or national experience. This led to ideas of salvation from sin and the promise of re-birth to eternal life (1913b, p.127).

Within the Hindu tradition early thinkers interpreted the energies of the world in human-like terms. A complex and detailed cosmology comprised a number of deities having sovereignty over the different spheres of life. The first significant development in Carpenter's view came with a recognition, by the Vedic poets, of the regularity and uniformity of the energies of nature. These energies were interpreted in human-like terms. The river, for example, was referred to as "the runner, the plougher, the nourisher" (1923, p.714). The earth and air were characterised in the form of personalised forms of power. The idea was developed of a sovereign above it all, in the form of Varuna, ruler of heaven, sometimes accompanied by Mitra, the Shining Friend. The Vedic poets thus reflected, not upon that which was exceptional, but upon that which was recurrent, and they personalised what they found. The Vedic poets found meaning and significance in this new-found orderliness of nature, identifying some unity

behind the variety. Thus they were, in Carpenter's view, "on the way to this high faith" (1923, p.716).

Nature thus ceases to be an immense assemblage of unexpected spontaneities; its events can be sorted into related groups, and the multiplicity of independent wills brought into harmony of permanence and kin (1923, p.715).

It was this "development" that moved Indian religion on from one stage to the next. This was manifested by the rejection of images and complex ritual, as exemplified by the seventh century Tamil poets, the Alvars, who favoured "pure, spiritual worship" (1917, p.388). Carpenter admired them for the way they focused on the inner religion of the heart. According to him, the Alvars rejected the idea of the ultimate authority of the written word. Formal writings ceased to be the rule of faith and practice as sacred law had become a bondage in the same way that daily ritual had become a constraint (1917, p.388). This was an important stage towards monotheism.

The next stage towards monotheism was the acceptance of Shiva as a personified manifestation of the Absolute (1920, pp.470-471). This brought a focus upon Shiva as the object of devout aspiration. Elaborate worship was rejected, the use of idols was criticised, and simplicity of devotion was called for. The devotees of Shiva saw their faith as open to all, with there being only one caste and only one God. Thus began the first stirrings of a yearning for the recognition of one God (1920, p.485). Carpenter felt that twentieth century Western influences were now making their mark upon Eastern religion. Consequently, Hinduism was in a position, he felt, to take the inevitable step towards monotheism for which the Alvars had much earlier laid the ground (1920, p.485).

An Appraisal

As has been indicated, the notion of evolution was an important one for Carpenter, as it was for other scholars of that period. It has been noted just how much Carpenter used the theory in his own way to support his claims for the supremacy of Unitarian Christianity. The strength of his arguments, however, needs analysis owing to the fact that Carpenter's method is not totally convincing. In appraising his views of evolution one immediately comes across a number of difficulties. Firstly, these involve his equation of evolutionism with Darwinism, as if Darwin were the originator and sole promoter of the theory. Secondly, there is a problem with his equation of evolution with human progress. Thirdly, there is a problem with his equation of evolution with the development of monotheism. Carpenter did not fully appreciate the consequences of holding evolutionary views and there are instances of incoherence and misapplication of the theory.

Firstly, the equation of evolutionary ideas with Darwinism is a prime example of how Carpenter got into difficulty with a misapplication of evolutionary ideas. It is not so much that he equated the creation of the theory of evolution with Darwin. It is that, after doing so, he then displayed contrary views to those of Darwin. Carpenter believed in an orderly evolution. In *A Century of Comparative Religion 1800-1900*, he suggested that the theory of evolution involved the belief that the "higher races" passed through the same early phases of development as those existing currently in the "lower races". All human development could be easily identified as being in some kind of orderly pattern. Nothing was "primitive" but merely an important element belonging to a clearly identifiable stage of culture (1900d, pp.11-12).

Carpenter pursued the same line of argument in *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World*. Key themes such as "co-ordination" and "continuity" were used in such a way as to suggest an orderly plan. This was indicative of the way

Carpenter moulded the theory of evolution to suit his thesis (1911b, pp.18-19). His stance, however, was far removed from Darwin's belief in natural selection and random variation. Darwin's system had no place for a personal God working arbitrarily in the world imposing upon it acts of whim or desire. This was a contrast to Carpenter's recognition of a controlling divinity working within human lives for their betterment. There are suggestions in *The Origin of Species* that Darwin did believe in a Supreme Being, as there were several references to a "Creator" (Darwin, 1859, pp.395f.). This was not a personal God intervening in human lives but an initiator of developmental laws. According to Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), Darwin did not really believe in a Creator at all and his several references to it were misleading.

She assumed that they were used colloquially, 'without reference to their primitive meaning. If so, they ought not to have been used: but the theory does not require the notion of creation; and my conviction is that Charles Darwin does not hold it' (Desmond and Moore, 1992, p.486).

If Harriet Martineau was right, then Darwin's attitude to religion was a big contrast to Carpenter's. Despite this, Carpenter believed that the study of the history of religion was firmly established on Darwin's principles. If there was a way of reconciling these contradictions then Carpenter was unaware of it.

The second problem Carpenter had in his use of evolutionary ideas was in his equation of evolution with human progress. He continually affirmed that religion advanced from a lower to a higher spirituality. He even spoke of the "insurance of human progress", progress that was identifiable, that was guaranteed by a mighty law, and that carried humanity forward to an unseen goal (1903c, p.308). In Carpenter's scheme, however, there was a falling back. As will be noted in the sections dealing with Carpenter's criticisms of Buddhism and Hinduism, he believed that both those religions had deteriorated from ancient and purer forms. This was not an uncommon view and

was held by individuals such as Max Müller and Monier-Williams. Nevertheless, such a view does contradict the idea of a steady line of evolutionary development. For Carpenter, evolutionary progress was not always linear but would take unpredictable and often retrogressive steps.

Carpenter revealed his inconsistency as regards evolutionary progress in the case also of Christianity. He believed that the period beginning soon after the death of Jesus was when Christianity was at its most ideal. From then on it had degenerated. This was due, he felt, to the practice of focusing on the person of Jesus as an object of worship. This is something, he said, that Jesus would never have himself initiated (1910d, p.10). Because of this focus, the Christian religion could only base itself upon an illusion, an illusion that would lead to inevitable disillusionment and deterioration.

It means the substitution of a religion based on the permanent facts of life, for one in which illusion could only lead to disappointment, and disappointment would in its turn beget either angry resentment or apathetic decay (1910d, p.10).

Carpenter felt that Unitarian Christianity was closer to that early manifestation of Christianity that was more nearly the ideal religion of Jesus. The way that Christianity had developed was retrogressive and there could only be progress if the major dogmas regarding the Atonement and the divine status of Jesus were rejected. Only without them could a different atmosphere be created, "in which the controversies of the fourth century die away of inanition". The "earthen vessels enshrining the treasure" would then be "shattered in the light of modern knowledge, and the treasure itself turns out to be something different from what was first supposed" (1910d, p.10).

How all this fits in with the evolutionary theory is difficult to determine. Carpenter certainly explained how humanity had taken gradual steps towards what he felt was human progress. The equation with Darwin, however, is impossible to justify.

The use of the theory of evolution is also questionable unless it is defined in terms of a process of human development that inevitably includes regression and divergence.

The third problem with Carpenter's use of the evolutionary theory concerns the way he used it to preach a growing belief in monotheism. The problem with Carpenter's approach here is that he was not always consistent. If he identified a progression of stages leading towards an acknowledgement of one God then that would seem to be a logical theory. As with Christianity, however, Carpenter did suggest that ancient India had enjoyed a purer form of religion, a form that later devotees had perverted. Carpenter admired the early Vedic poets whom he believed to be very close to acceptance of the notion of a personal deity (1923, p.716). By gradual steps the Vedic poets formalised and categorised their experiences and their environment. They ultimately saw the whole creation and the social order linked together in one vast scheme. Behind the stability of the natural world the poets recognised in an undefined way an omnipotent wisdom (1923, p.724). Hinduism degenerated, according to Carpenter, with the doctrine of *karma*, something he felt was not integral to primal Indian religion, and the notion of an omnipotent wisdom was lost.

The literature of India will be searched in vain after the Vedic age for anything analogous to the book of Job on the one hand, or the hundred and fourth Psalm [celebrating God's omnipotence and wisdom as displayed in the creation] on the other (1911b, p.87).

This deterioration does not fit comfortably with Carpenter's belief in a steady evolution towards monotheism.

On this issue there is also the question as to how Carpenter viewed Hindu reform movements. If, as he believed, Hinduism had gradually degenerated from an original purer form of religion, it is difficult to understand how he could be so positive about the Brahmo Samaj. Mainstream Hinduism, he said, had developed "outworn and

decaying creeds", they hung on to "ancient idolatries" and retained a philosophy that "restrained the energies of reform" (1912b, pp.3-7). He believed the Brahmo Samaj to be closer to the early teachings of the Indian poets and preserved the worship of God "in spirit and in truth" (1912b, p.3). He felt that the main body of Hinduism did not include it because the Brahmo Samaj was partly a creature of Western culture. Though it was connected with religious teachings going back "to the dawn of history" (1912b, p.2), the Brahmo Samaj was influenced by all aspects of European civilisation. It had, according to Carpenter, an opportunity and an obligation to create a theology and philosophy that made best use of all influences and traditions, both Indian and European (1912b, p.6).

Other modern reform movements within Hinduism seem to have escaped Carpenter's attention. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), for example, was gaining Western audiences and supporters from the 1890s onwards. He formed the Ramakrishna Mission to make it socially active and appealing to the West. Over four years he toured the world, including making two celebrated visits to London, in order to promote the teachings of Ramakrishna (1836-1886). He spoke to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, an event enthusiastically supported by Carpenter. Vivekananda also made converts in England, their departure for India being a public event. His works (1894-1902), of which there were many, displayed an approach to Indian religious culture that one would expect to be congenial to Carpenter. They were written in English and addressed to Western audiences. Vivekananda rejected most doctrines, as he did caste restrictions and rules of purity. He sought to make mysticism both rational and practical. Vivekananda found an affinity between his Advaita Vedanta and Western thought, particularly the ideas represented by Spencer. He also attacked Christianity for its formality and its lost spirituality. Carpenter wrote nothing about Vivekananda even though the latter had for many years been on the fringes of the Brahmo Samaj.

That Carpenter published no significant comment on such movements does leave the reader with an unresolved question. This concerns Carpenter's justification for a steady evolutionary growth when faced with his statements about Hindu degeneration. There is also the issue of how modern manifestations of the religion fitted in with his scheme. The same questions could be asked regarding the developments in Christianity. There was either a steady evolutionary growth towards a purer religion, the most advanced stage being represented by liberal Christianity, or Christianity deteriorated over time and liberal Christianity laid a claim to its original purity. The two positions are mutually exclusive and cannot be reconciled.

Also connected with Carpenter's use of evolution to promote the idea of a growing monotheism is the issue regarding the supremacy of monotheism itself. Carpenter made a major assumption in upholding monotheism as a superior form of theism. He did not, however, find a way of justifying his position. The only claim he made was that monotheism had an inbuilt moral force that inspired individuals to making social progress. In the history of Indian religion, for example, he noted how the stages of development towards monotheism were parallel to the stages of development towards acknowledgment of social responsibility. Thus, Hinduism in what Carpenter called its "pantheism" phase was a prisoner of its institutional side and lacked any missionary force. Only in its "higher theism" phase, exemplified by the Brahmo Samaj, did it "ally itself with social or national life " (1911b, p.88). Why monotheism equalled social awareness Carpenter never explained. Nor did he explain why he did not give Islam more sustained treatment. Islam's monotheism was clearer and more uncompromising than any form of Hinduism. Carpenter was making a judgment here from the certainty of his own position, the monotheism espoused by Unitarianism, but without a detailed analysis of the different forms of theism and why one was superior. This is an example of Carpenter's sometimes unclear thinking and his overriding priority, to uphold his own theological position.

In recognition of the consequences of the application of the evolutionary theory one must ask why Carpenter made use of it at all. This question will be pursued in greater detail in Chapter 6. It must be said at this stage, however, that Carpenter's interpretation of the theory did not really do justice to it. In Carpenter's defence one must remember that the theory was overwhelming in the Victorian period. In some circles it was a theory that was taken for granted as a basis for the development of modern theology and philosophy. The rise of industrialism and the growing strength of the British Empire could also be cited as evidence for evolution. Unitarian circles lauded it as a great advance. "Unitarians, with their traditional interest in science, were among the few religious people who welcomed the discovery of evolution" (Holt, 1938, p.344). It has been suggested that Unitarianism in Britain accepted the theory enthusiastically and wholeheartedly.

"Unitarians accept the evidence for this evolution and most of them in Great Britain,...believe that it was Divine power which gave the original impetus to this amazing and wonderful process... Science cannot answer the question whether evolution was divinely planned, but it can reinforce religious convictions that it was. (Hall, 1962, p.116).

In 1879, an editorial in *The Inquirer* voiced the view of many Unitarians when it affirmed the doctrine of evolution as an explanation for the similarities between the religions. Christianity was declared superior because of its position as a later stage of evolutionary development.

Some of the leading dogmas of the greater religions are closely allied in thought and expression. It is true that we do not find these dogmas in the same stage of development in every religion, or in each epoch of evolution... Christianity is a religion of the same kind as all other religions, but different in

degree of excellence and beauty (*The Inquirer*, June 14th, 1879).

For Unitarians of the nineteenth century evolution was a great discovery, which was the starting point for the development of theological and philosophical theories. It was an ingrained part of the culture of liberal Christian communities that was barely questioned. It is in this environment that Carpenter worked, and in such a culture he developed his own stance as to what evolution meant for him.

A Justification

Having considered the problems of Carpenter's espousal of evolutionary ideas it is now necessary to consider how he could justify what appear to be contradictory remarks. In his later years Carpenter found a way of understanding and expressing what he felt to be a complex but positive evolution. Carpenter believed in a steady growth of Christian values that arose out of Jesus's teachings. Human progress meant absorption of such values and an application into all areas of life. This progress continued alongside a parallel growth of doctrines that concentrated on the person of Jesus. Though this greater doctrinal growth was what Carpenter felt was unnecessary, there was always a deeper and purer nucleus that continued and progressed. These deeper values were also to be found within other religions, though they were buried within unnecessary doctrines. These values included recognition of human unity, mutual love, and self-control. Carpenter saw the application of these in the creation of institutions such as the American federal system and the British Commonwealth (1924b, p.153).

Though on the one hand negative human behaviour still existed, for Carpenter there was nonetheless a growing awareness of more positive values that were still developing. Carpenter acknowledged the damage that humanity continued to do to itself especially in the name of religion, but he felt that more noble virtues were also

developing. These were sometimes hidden but nonetheless existed and influenced humankind.

The war spirit dies hard. Over against such deadly egotism stands the spirit that seeks the common good. Racial animosities can only be conquered by the gradual substitution of law for force, the growth of mutual confidence to dispel suspicion (1924b, p.155).

The most advanced stage of evolution for Carpenter was the one wherein these values could be acknowledged unpolluted with unnecessary doctrines. As will be seen, Carpenter found a number of elements in Christianity that made it an improvement on the other religions of the world.

For Carpenter, then, evolution was not directly connected with the scientific theory, though he did not acknowledge this. In fact, he believed that his form of evolution was in keeping with that of Darwin and others. For Carpenter, however, evolution was the expression of a conviction that there was a discernible movement, from primal yearnings after meaning, to the recognition of God's hand in guiding humanity towards a fuller revelation. For Carpenter, Unitarian Christianity was the latest stage in that revelation.

Carpenter's Judgment of the Religions

For Carpenter to claim that a religion was at an advanced stage of evolutionary development it was necessary for him to establish certain criteria to justify his position. There were a number of hallmarks of advanced religion that Carpenter applied to the different religions. Applying them to Buddhism, for example, convinced him that it was a religion that surpassed Hinduism but that left it inferior to Christianity. These criteria of advanced religion, the centrality of ethics, social progress, the abandonment of mythology, the conquering of ignorance, personal salvation, monotheism and joy will be

considered individually before dealing with Carpenter's application of them to specific religions. Comment will also be made upon the nature of evolution as it was applied to them, as this will make clear how Carpenter was able to categorise the religions as he did.

The Criteria for Advanced Religion:

1. The Centrality of Ethics

One of the "fundamental conceptions" of Christianity was, in Carpenter's view, that of the centrality of ethics. The ethical basis of Christianity was a vital determinant of its status of most advanced religion. Thus the centrality of ethics was a criterion for judging any religion's status as an advanced religion in the evolutionary scheme. The true nature of any religion was not so much how it could be characterised as a system of thought but to what degree its founders and teachers instilled in its followers a "moral endeavour" (1906a, p.504). The evolutionary progress that humanity was making, said Carpenter, was nothing to do with moving towards a common creed. It was, on the contrary, a gradual "approximation" of ethical aims (1911b, p.111).

For Carpenter, the universal moral experience was the first and most powerful element of revelation. The aim of religion was to develop the awareness of that ethical truth by heeding the conscience, something that Carpenter referred to as "the witness of God within us" (1893b, p.845). By recognising the importance of the ethical demand Carpenter believed that the religions would come closer together as they acknowledged their shared aims.

2. Social Progress

Connected with the issue of ethics was how it was extended to incorporate an awareness of the needs of the whole community. An advanced religion, for Carpenter, was one where social progress was an integral concern of its adherents as expressed in its

literature and its practice. Carpenter cited examples of religions of the “lower culture” (1913b, p.72), such as early Chinese religion and Vedic religion, that had teachings involving the embodiment of the divine order in the whole of human relations (1903c, p.313). Such ideas had faded, however, except within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. According to Carpenter, Judaism was a socially aware culture that focused its attention on the concept of the people of Israel. Christianity had built upon that notion with a new idea of the whole of humanity being the field of operation where God worked through people for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. “Now, thanks to Jesus, Man not Israel is the son of God” (1903c, p.316).

For Carpenter, then, social progress was a vital criterion for advanced religion. Life was a trust where each individual had a duty to promote public welfare (1912b, p.7). This duty included the need to seek for justice and order, principles that Carpenter felt were “common aspirations” (1916a, p.38). These virtues were important elements that would help to bring about the growth of “mutual confidence” (1924b, p.155). Social progress would be brought about by the commitment of individuals to serve their fellow human beings. Such human service was, said Carpenter, “the key to life” (1905b, p.21).

3. The Abandonment of Mythology

What Carpenter believed stood in the way of any religion achieving social progress was unnecessary mythology. The rejection of such mythology was thus his third criterion of advanced religion. Speculations on the persons of great religious leaders, claims for supernatural origins, and miraculous justifications for authority were all condemned by Carpenter as “ancient idolatries” (1912b, p.6) that stifled human creativity. Carpenter believed that such “envelopments of outworn tradition” (1911b, p.111) were not fundamental to any religion, that they redirected the focus away from ethical and social aspirations (1911b, p.108). In Carpenter’s view, the permanent value

of any religion was to be sought in the measure to which they could be verified by human experience rather than by mythological claims (1911b, p.85).

Carpenter admitted that Christianity was open to criticism about its mythological aspects, that it had yet to abandon its supernatural claims. Christianity, however, sought to absorb “modern knowledge” (1911b, p.112), a principle of judgment using cultural faculties, exercised in order to discover the basics of faith. Thus, said Carpenter, Christianity would eventually disengage itself from mythological speculation and allow its “fundamental conceptions” to be manifested (1911b, p.111).

4. The Conquering of Ignorance

For Carpenter, the creation of unnecessary mythology was due to ignorance. Thus, in Carpenter’s scheme, a religion at an advanced stage of evolutionary development was one that sought to conquer ignorance. For him ignorance was not simply a lack of knowledge. The idea that salvation could be dependent upon the acquisition of knowledge is suggestive of Gnosticism, a philosophy long opposed by the official Church. For the official Christian Church ignorance was traditionally thought of as an unwillingness to accept one’s own sinful state, a denial of the need for a change of heart.

Carpenter’s understanding of ignorance was different from that of the Gnostic or the official Christian Church. To him, ignorance was an inability to comprehend the full significance of one’s experience or a lack of awareness of the true meaning of existence. The conquering of ignorance was to be accomplished by a cultural faculty available to all people. He referred to the virtue of “religious imagination” (1898a, p.63), a human facility to make sense of things beyond the visible. It enabled the individual to look upon the parts of reality that made up the whole and to find a unity. This “religious imagination” was not easily acquired but was a form of spiritual insight that needed to be educated by all “the instruments of the Spirit”. These included “poetry, art, science,

philosophy, law", all of which were means of discovering the divine unity (1924a, p.307).

5. *Universal Personal Salvation*

The fifth criterion of advanced religion, for Carpenter, was universal personal salvation. For him that meant the continual existence of the individual after death. Carpenter stated that the theory of evolution encouraged such a belief. He felt that as developments were made in the world of ideas, and that as humanity progressed in the creation of values, there would be enacted a cosmic injustice if individuals could not benefit from such achievements when lives were cut short. Carpenter took inspiration also from the scientific world. He noted the view that energy, once imparted, can never be dispersed or destroyed, it can only undergo change. Carpenter believed that the human soul underwent change but continued to retain its own individuality and distinctiveness.

I see not why we should not believe that our spirits are themselves such centres of potency, and may pass through change after change of external condition without loss of identity or strength (1903c, p.119).

What complicated the issue for Carpenter's readers was his use of terms that undermined his claims for universal salvation. Terms such as "conversion" (1910b, p.656), "evangelicalism" (1905b, p.20) and "salvation by faith" (1913a, p.504), used with reference to Unitarian teachings, seem to suggest a belief in conditional salvation. Such language, however, was used in Unitarian circles in the Victorian period to bring new meanings to traditional Protestant teachings and thus retain a link with the heritage on which Unitarianism was built. Thus, conversion was a change in the grand purpose of life. It was about choosing "to live no longer for ends that are narrow and selfish, but for ends that are broad, Christian, and humane" (Sears, 1877, p.71). Evangelicalism was

simply the enthusiastic propagation of Unitarian Christianity. Salvation by faith was the growth of character towards perfection brought about by discovering one's faith in human possibilities (Hall, 1962, pp.84-88).

We are saved when we escape from our selfishness into love, from our worldliness into purity, from our false lives into true ones. Then we are figuratively said to be born again (Clarke, 1886, p.196).

Carpenter himself was prepared to use such terminology so long as there was a readiness for a re-working of the meanings or a "modification" of theological ideas (1910d, p.9). It did not suggest that he was anything other than a believer in universal personal salvation, involving an afterlife whereby an individual's distinctiveness continued to exist. For Carpenter this was a crucial doctrine. The idea of conditional immortality, he felt, suggested that God's purposes were frustrated and thus God had failed in the task of reuniting with his creatures (1903c, p.144). Universal salvation guaranteed God's authority and allowed the individual to accomplish its destiny. "The eternal...is the soul's true goal" (1903c, p.129).

6. *Monotheism*

Having now established Carpenter's justification for universal personal salvation, it is important to note that that criterion was meaningless to him without a connected belief in monotheism. As was noted in the earlier section of this chapter, monotheism was something that Carpenter believed developed over time when primal worshippers began to lose their connection with the land and began to speculate on the origin of the world. Thus, in his scheme, there was a clear linear process that led from a simple worship of the elements to a more profound acknowledgement of a God that was responsible for all of humanity.

In Carpenter's view a vehicle was required to make possible the transfer of belief from primal religion to a form of monotheism. The vehicle usually took the form

of a person to whom was granted a divine status. In Hinduism literary heroes became identified with an authority and a power that was greater than that of the human. Eventually, they were identified as *avatars* representing the indefinable Absolute (1909b, p.230). In Buddhism, the Buddha was originally a great man of wisdom. After his death he was experienced as a manifestation of the Infinite (1913b, p.128). In Christianity, it was Jesus who conveyed to humanity the knowledge and experience of God. In Carpenter's assessment of the religions the crucial factor that determined a religion's status as advanced was how far an elevated teacher or leader could be conceived of as being the bearer of divinity without necessarily being divine.

Monotheistic belief was made possible, in Carpenter's view, by a number of factors. Reflection on experience of encounter with the divine was valuable, fed by the skills taught by history and philosophy (1909b, p.247). Though ethics was a vital criterion for determining an advanced religion, this was not enough. According to Carpenter, the problem of one's ultimate destiny was to be solved by seeking to understand one's experience and by seeking the ideals of truth, beauty and goodness (1911b, pp.90-91). One would then become aware of the true nature of God. In other words, monotheistic belief came about through the benefits of modern knowledge and culture. An advanced religion, then, was one that could be identified as being influenced by modern, or more specifically Western, civilisation.

7. The Criterion of Joy

For Carpenter, the conviction of the reality of the one God was a reason for joy. Joy was the response to the truth of monotheism. In Carpenter's approach, joy lay at the heart of advanced religion, as it was the impulse that moved humanity to make progress. A religion without joy could not, said Carpenter, produce the human urge to work for the benefit of one's fellows. It was what led to social action and the furtherance of peace (1911b, p.89). This joy was to be found, he said, in the Christian's sense of security in

God's eternity and in the conviction of one's personal permanence. For Carpenter it was essential to believe that there was an individual personal entity dependent upon a relationship with God that was permanent. The idea that the human soul could be transitory and that there was no guaranteed future for the individual was a cause for gloom. Christianity was superior, Carpenter believed, because of its total conviction that God was in control, that surrender to God brought comfort and joy and assurance (1906c, p.27).

It was thus this set of criteria that Carpenter used to determine the status of any religion as one that was advanced in evolutionary terms. It was by applying them across the range of the religions that he was able to place Buddhism higher than Hinduism, for example, though both were less advanced than his own liberal Christianity.

The Nature of Evolution

Having considered, earlier in this chapter, the various ways that Carpenter spoke of evolution, it is necessary now to take into account certain important aspects of evolution in Carpenter's scheme. As Carpenter was someone who used the theory of evolution to make claims about his own theological position, he was not subject to the usual assumptions about how the theory was justified. Carpenter's model of evolution was his own and, in order for it to work, certain principles had to be applied.

The Non-Chronological State of Evolution

Carpenter's first principle of evolution was that the stage of advancement enjoyed by any religion was not determined by its chronology. Buddhism was considered more advanced than Hinduism, not because Buddhism developed later than Hinduism but because it satisfied more of the aforementioned criteria. It was thus possible for an older religion to be more advanced than a newer one. Christianity therefore was a more advanced religion than Islam. This would normally be a difficult

claim to make, as Islam is a chronological successor to Christianity and could not therefore be thought of as a preparation for Christianity. There are writings by Muslim theologians, such as Syed Ameer Ali, that make the claim that the Judaeo-Christian tradition is evolving towards Islam, that the contributions of Moses and Jesus were valuable steps towards the fulfilment accomplished by Muhammad (Ali, 1922, p.111). This argument has its own internal logic and thus Carpenter needed a coherent device for claiming the supremacy of Christianity. It is surprising that Carpenter did not face this difficulty as he was aware of Ali's work and praised Ali's presentation of Islam as the most attractive form of it (1911b, p.78).

In many ways Islam seems to have manifested characteristics that satisfied the criteria of advanced religion. For example, Carpenter believed it had a valuable role to play in the teaching of ethics amongst the African people where it was "a powerful agent for good" (1911b, pp.75-77). It was also a monotheistic religion that proclaimed its article of belief in God "with a majesty of language and conviction" (1911b, p.76). It could be argued that Islam is thus a more evolved religion than Christianity, since Christianity holds to the doctrine of the Trinity, and hence is only at a halfway stage between polytheism and monotheism.

Carpenter's response to such acknowledgements was that Islam provided nothing new. For Carpenter, Islam was not a distinctive system as it merely restated the principles of Judaism and Christianity as regards monotheism, ethics and human destiny. "Much of its teaching is only a restatement of old truths with fresh force" (1911b, p.76). As regards the pure monotheism that Islam claimed to teach, Carpenter believed that Christianity had evolved in this direction in its Unitarian form with its rejection of the Trinity. Carpenter felt that the doctrine of the Trinity was restrictive in that it failed to uphold the ideal of humanity as social beings. The persons of the Godhead, he said, were independent and isolated, they needed no help from one another and extended no support: "Ties of mutual duty are inconceivable" (1910d, p.23). It was, he said, the

concept of “the sublime unity” that would be “the impelling force of the future” (1910d, p.23).

Internal Evolution

Carpenter’s scheme of evolution in the face of apparent inconsistencies was also secured by the principle of internal evolution. Carpenter did not always treat the religions as closed united systems of belief. Different manifestations of one religious tradition could represent different stages of evolutionary progress and there was always a fluidity that resulted in no religion, even Christianity, being able to claim finality (1906a, p.504). There were always some forms of a religion that progressed whilst other forms retained their “popular” nature.

Carpenter displayed consistency in his claims for internal evolution. Christianity was subject to the same fluidity in that its different forms represented different stages of evolution. Some forms of Christianity were so locked into a concern for the eschatological aspects that they had abandoned ethical and social concerns. “The issues of eternity seemed to blot out the needs of time” (1903c, p.306). Thus, it was Unitarian Christianity that represented the latest stage of evolution. Unitarianism was itself, however, subject to evolutionary changes and had itself evolved over time. “During the hundred years which have since passed the type of thought represented by a common name has passed through many phases (1925a, p.4). There were, Carpenter believed, more evolutionary changes to come. Quoting his colleague, James Drummond (1835-1918), he claimed that “Christianity has still its grandest victories to win” (1925a, p.19).

The concept of internal evolution thus enabled Carpenter to analyse the various different manifestations of the religions and treat them separately. It did not, however, help to answer the problem raised by Carpenter regarding the apparent degeneration of religion. Carpenter taught that there were pure elements of religion that had become obscured over time by unnecessary speculations. In Carpenter’s view, for example,

Buddhism had begun as a moral discipline that rejected all metaphysical discussion but had developed into a “highly complex ontological scheme” that was “quite inconsistent with the proper Buddhist psychology” (1904a, p.9). Similarly, Hinduism had abandoned the ideals of “charity, gentleness and sympathy” with the advent of the caste system and the doctrine of *karma* (1921a, p.677).

If there had been a degeneration of the religions as they abandoned basic principles, then it would seem that there could be no case for evolutionary development. If religions were deteriorating then they were not advancing but falling back. For Carpenter, however, the issue was far more complex. He was an optimist who believed that God would ultimately be vindicated in that the divine purpose in history would be accomplished. The process whereby God achieved that purpose was, he believed, beyond human comprehension and humanity’s advance was “slow and difficult” (1910d, p.3). Carpenter’s scheme thus envisaged no even progress. The stepping backwards was part of the human experience but this would not deflect God from the plan for humanity.

The Need for Human Cooperation

In Carpenter’s scheme there was also an element of human cooperation required in the working out of God’s plan. Humanity’s creative faculties were needed to ensure a steady evolutionary advancement. God did not manipulate humanity, and, although human progress was assured, this assurance came from the strength of God in “guiding” rather than directing humanity (1903c, p.308). Carpenter had the highest regard for the authority of the individual, the existence of which had “a wholly incalculable significance” (1903c, p.322). Thus it was individual human creativity that would bring into being the culmination of God’s plan. Only with the growth of knowledge would humanity slowly gain the faculties required for the working out of that plan (1925a, p.16). The human role in advancing God’s plan, however, in Carpenter’s view, was both “obligatory” and yet “free” (1925a, p.19). “The first condition of the quest for truth is

Liberty" (1914a, p.189). It thus follows that human progress could be erratic and retrogressive even if there was a steady advancement over all.

Evolution was, then, dependent on human cooperation. In Carpenter's view, there was a way whereby humanity could guarantee the evolutionary process in the times in which he lived. That was by means of interaction between the religions. Carpenter believed that only by interacting with other religions could the syntheses of knowledge demanded for progress be achieved. Contact with the religions of the East would bring "fresh insight and patience" (1906a, p.526) as the moral ideals of, for example, Buddhism and Christianity, would approach one another. Carpenter believed that by interacting with other religions individuals would gain a clearer insight into their own faith. They would thus learn to distinguish between the permanent truths of a religion and its transitory speculations and thereby "disengage the essence from the form" (1890d, p.173). This breakthrough in understanding would lead to a sense of a common identity, the acknowledgement that humanity had a common purpose and a common fate (1890d, p.176; 1912a, p.94; 1916a, p.78).

Carpenter argued for recognition of the fundamental principles of religion that could be unearthed in every tradition. These included the consciousness of evil and the trust that "in the constitution of things there dwells an eternal Right" (1890d, p.195). By accepting common yearnings and common concerns the human race could evolve and make progress as the different traditions would reveal the same evidence of a divine plan (1890d, p.199). Carpenter was inspired and encouraged by the International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress held in Berlin in 1910. He discovered at the Congress a common concern for questions of morality and social responsibility that overrode any doctrinal issues. Furthermore, he believed that there was a common desire to express those concerns in actual life and improve human conditions. The Congress was a success, he felt, because the sharing of such insights dissipated prejudice and

established a common approach to the way in which the future could be faced (1910c, pp.4-5).

Carpenter's symbol of evolutionary progress was that of the "large-hearted man". Such an individual encountered the teachings of other religions and regarded them as the same truths as those embodied in his or her own faith. This acknowledgement brought such an individual closer to spiritual reality and thus to a closer relationship with God (1900d, p.47). For Carpenter, spiritual reality embraced the concept that there was basically just one religion, that the differences between the religions were superficial and that, on close inspection, there was a harmony between the religions (1893b, p.844). Human progress was dependent upon the acceptance of the principle that Carpenter used on several occasions and has already been quoted in this thesis, "theologies may be many, yet religion is one" (1893b, p.846). Evolution was, then, in Carpenter's view, dependent upon human initiative, this time necessitating a positive decision to relate and interact with adherents of the different world religions.

Carpenter's application of his evolutionary approach to other religions will be considered in the next few chapters. In the next chapter I shall deal specifically with how Carpenter used his evolutionary formula to assess Buddhism and how it fitted into his scheme.

CHAPTER 4

CARPENTER AND BUDDHISM

Introduction

- In the preceding chapter I have considered Carpenter's interpretation of the theory of evolution. All religions, in his view, were subject to evolution. Carpenter believed that religions were subject also to internal evolutionary developments that progressed erratically. These depended upon human readiness to cooperate in bringing about stages of advancement. Thus, there could even be decline and regression. This was true of Buddhism where his most extensive and most important work was pursued. In this chapter I shall show how Carpenter presented Buddhism in the context of his theory of evolution. This will be done by examining the sources of his claims and by considering the difficulties consequent upon them.

Before considering how Carpenter presented his work on Buddhism it is important to note the extent and range of his studies in the subject. At least twenty of Carpenter's works were specifically concerned with Buddhism, though many more dealt with Buddhism in the context of Comparative Religion as a whole. His first work on the religion, *The Obligations of the New Testament to Buddhism* (1880a), was one of his first substantial publications in any field. His last work on the subject, *Buddhism and Christianity: a Contrast and a Parallel* (1924a), was produced only three years before his death.

It should be noted that Carpenter did not explore all forms and transmissions of Buddhism. He wrote a good deal about the formation of early Buddhism and the development of its early teachings. He also gave a great deal of prominence to the Japanese forms of Pure Land Buddhism. To other forms of Buddhism he gave scant

attention. For example, Tibetan Buddhism was referred to only in passing. One example of this is a brief reference to the addition of certain transcendental ideas based on the Sanskrit writings of Nepal (1902a, p.38). Chinese Buddhism, except in its Pure Land form, was referred to only briefly in *The Place of Christianity Among the Religions of the World*. This was a mention of the several Chinese sects within Buddhism (1911b, pp.66-67). There was also a minor reference in *Buddhism and Christianity: a Contrast and a Parallel* when a comparison was made between Kwan Yin and the Virgin Mary (1924a, p.219).

There were other forms of Buddhism that Carpenter omitted to deal with in any detail. He wrote almost nothing about Zen Buddhism. The notable exception was a passage detailing the disparagement by Zen of current Buddhist ceremonial, writings and learning in favour of contemplation (1924a, p.290). There was also only a brief reference to the foundation of Zen in 1191 by Ei-Sai (1906a, p.506). Nichiren Buddhism was dealt with only briefly when a few passing comments were made on it in a reference to “philosophical Buddhism” and the development of the doctrine of the *trikaya* (1906a, p.513). Carpenter said little about Western transmissions of Buddhism although, admittedly, there were few examples at that time. Carpenter merely mentioned the arrival of Buddhism in the Mediterranean region (1921b, p.109).

When considering Carpenter’s works one must remember that he had little direct experience of other faith communities. His knowledge of Buddhism was primarily dependent upon what he could glean from ancient texts. Although this approach did not allow for an understanding of Buddhism in all its complexity, it was the approach taken by many other scholars at that time including, for example, Max Müller.

Carpenter’s interest in Buddhism was focused on sacred literature. In the Victorian period scholars in the West perceived their role as analysing Buddhist writings and, as the West was the possessor of Buddhist texts, it was Western scholars whose work determined how Buddhism was portrayed. Research focused on the Pali texts and,

in the late Victorian period, scholars edited many of the Pali works, particularly after the creation of the Pali Text Society in 1881. Despite this, it was not until the twentieth century that there was a resolution of the question as to which were the oldest, the Pali texts or the Sanskrit texts. There were scholars, such as Eugène Burnouf (1801-1852), who were convinced that the Sanskrit writings were the oldest documents and that they had at some stage been translated into Pali. The priority of the Pali texts, however, gained ground owing to the influence of the book, *The First Twenty Chapters of the Mahawanso* (Turnour, 1836).

When dealing with Carpenter's work on Buddhism it is necessary to recall the position that the religion had in his evolutionary scheme. Carpenter believed that all religions were part of an identifiable evolutionary development. For Carpenter, Buddhism was an advance on Hinduism because it bore more of the hallmarks of an advanced religion as determined by the seven criteria he established and that were introduced in Chapter 3. As will be seen, Carpenter considered that Christianity was more advanced than Buddhism because the latter had degenerated more than Christianity and had lost some of its earlier idealism.

The work drawn from textual analysis led to the development in the Western mind of an ideal Buddhism. Amongst other stimuli, the growth of religious literature and the ideological pluralism of the Victorian age encouraged this (Almond, 1988, p.35). This ideal Buddhism of its origins, derived from textual analysis, was compared with the actual practice of Buddhism in the East. This led to a belief that contemporary Buddhism had progressively decayed from this ideal position since the death of the Buddha. It was believed that the benefits of the Buddha's noble teachings had been wiped out by pantheism and by "mystic fancies" (Beal, 1884, p.228).

Original ideal Buddhism, said the Victorians, had been in decay because of the lack of intelligence and the over-active imagination of the Eastern mind. The Western scholar was interested in the philosophical aspects of Buddhism but was repelled by its

mythology. The Western scholar saw the Eastern follower as gloomy, unoriginal and credulous. The writer of one book, for example, made a stark contrast between the cheerful Christian view of life in which Christ proclaimed that he came to bring abundant life to all with a Buddhism that pessimistically proclaimed that life was in itself an evil (Bixby, 1890, p.556). This, then, was the West's understanding of Buddhism in the period in which Carpenter was working. For the Western scholar, an ideal Buddhism was to be uncovered by an analysis of its ancient texts. Later doctrinal developments could then be put into context.

Carpenter's Sources of Inspiration

Major Scholars

The Buddhist scholar most well known by Carpenter was Rhys Davids, a researcher whose efforts resulted, according to Carpenter, in the scholars of Europe being "roused at last" to the value of studying ancient Buddhist texts (1911b, p.49). Rhys Davids was a good friend of Carpenter's and the latter's interest in the Pali language and its religious literature was at least encouraged by Rhys Davids (Farnell, 1929, p.162).

Rhys Davids' interest in Pali was first aroused when he worked as a magistrate with the Ceylonese Civil Service. Having to deal with a case involving a point of ecclesiastical law he realised it could only be resolved by reference to Pali texts (Snelling, 1987, p.224) and this inspired him to master the Pali language. On his return to Britain he brought with him a palm leaf manuscript of the complete Tripitaka. He thus had a linguistic competence that was not shared by many Buddhologists at that time.

Rhys Davids' assumptions about Buddhism were based upon his belief that the foundations of the religion were to be discovered by study of the ancient texts. For him, genuine Buddhism was a historical phenomenon, a form of belief and practice that represented an early stage of human development. The study of Buddhism through its

ancient texts was thus important in leading to a greater understanding of how religious ideas progressed among humankind. This would throw light on the factors involved in the development of religion in Europe (1897, p.192). He also examined how Buddhism had changed and diversified and saw this as an example of how humanity builds upon a purer original faith that in time deteriorates. It is, he believed, the ancient religion that is the genuine manifestation.

Rhys Davids held that Buddhism was representative of how humanity takes a simple code of faith and practice and weaves out of it elaborate credal and ritual systems. "The history of Buddhism from its commencement to its close is an epitome of the religious history of mankind" (1897, p.191). Rhys Davids saw his task as discovering the nature of ancient and original Buddhism. This pure form, he believed, had been perverted by later speculations on the person of the Buddha and by myths concerning his birth and mystical powers. These were the products, he argued, of the Oriental's love of exaggeration (1877, p.188). These later mythological elements needed to be swept away in order to discover the depth of character of the Buddha. Thus would be discovered a unique individual, an original thinker and a great contributor to questions of human morality (1879, p.901) whose teachings encouraged the practice of liberty and tolerance (1897, p.4).

Rhys Davids' method of study involved making comparisons with Christianity. In doing so he came to the conclusion that the two religions developed in remarkably similar fashions. This indicated to him that humanity has a natural instinct to build speculative material upon a basic faith. In their original forms, however, there are differences that Rhys Davids emphasised. He believed that Buddhism taught a very healthy doctrine of salvation, for example, as compared with Christianity. There were scholars in the Victorian era who condemned Buddhism for being gloomy and pessimistic. This was the case, for example, with Herman Oldenberg (1854-1920) (1882, p.212) and Monier-Williams (1889, p.54). Rhys Davids argued that Buddhism compared

well with Christianity on this issue (1879, pp.890f). It was Christianity that considered the world as a place of torment from which one could hope eventually to be freed for the joy of a better world beyond. Buddhism, on the other hand, considered such a hope as groundless. What was important was life in the present world (1897, p.29).

Rhys Davids also considered Christianity to be the more selfish of the two religions. The aim of Buddhism, he argued, was to seek the happiness of all beings instead of the pursuance of one's own salvation.

Must we have a belief in some personal happiness that we ourselves are to enjoy hereafter? Is it not enough to hope that our self-denials and our struggles will add to the happiness of others? And if we can sometimes catch a glimpse of the glories that certainly lie hid behind the veil of the infinite future, is not that enough, and more than enough, to fill our hearts with an abiding faith and hope stronger, deeper, truer, than any selfishness can give? (1897, p.215).

There is a problem here in that Rhys Davids, as well as Carpenter, misunderstood the Buddhist notion of equanimity. Buddhism was not preaching a notion of altruism but this is how early scholars understood it (Almond, 1988, pp.111-118).

Carpenter's approach was similar to Rhys Davids' in a number of ways. Carpenter also found a great deal of value in making comparisons between Buddhism and Christianity in the belief that there was a basic faith that had been perverted over time. Numerous of his books and essays took this approach (1910a; 1910b; 1912a; 1924a). Although Rhys Davids was critical of a number of individual aspects of Buddhist doctrine, such as *nirvana* (1876, p.434), he referred to Buddhism in very positive tones (1897, p.4). For Carpenter also, Buddhism was a very noble religion. It was an essential stage in the evolution of humanity and thus its teachings were of value in terms of human knowledge and understanding. "Shall we not welcome the faith of the

Far East as a help in the great providential enterprise of the education of the race?"

(1924a, p.231).

The greatest influence upon Carpenter by Rhys Davids was the importance laid upon him of learning the Pali language. For Carpenter the learning of Pali was essential and had significant benefits in the study of Buddhism in its ancient textual form. In his introduction to the *Sumangala-Vilasini*, Carpenter expressed just how much he had benefited from a study of that document and the *Digha Nikaya* in their original form (1886b, p.vii).

Carpenter was also familiar with Max Müller's work on Buddhism. Carpenter considered him a genius, though he did admit that the philological approach pursued by Max Müller had been abandoned by most of the scholars of his time (1913b, p.175). Max Müller's major preoccupation was with the search for the origins of religion and the way in which religion concerned itself with morals and myths. Max Müller believed in a steady line of human progress. This was exemplified in the way he traced the stages by which religion evolved in human consciousness. The different religions were merely aspects of the one religious consciousness.

A method that Max Müller used to explore his thesis was to make comparisons between Buddhism and Christianity. The aim was to discover how the one religious consciousness had manifested itself. He did discover a number of parallels especially with regard to the myths surrounding the persons of Jesus and the Buddha. He did not, however, suggest from this that there was any historical connection between the two religions (1883, p.279). Instead, he argued that there were similar circumstances, or a common foundation, in each community that created parallel myths and doctrines. The two religions were not always saying the same thing, Max Müller argued. The differences were not significant, however, as they merely manifested the truth expressed in different forms.

When two religions say the same thing, it is not always the same thing; but even if it is, should we not rather rejoice and try with all our might to add to what may be called the heavenly dowry of the human race, the common stock of truth? (Max Müller, 1906, p.166).

Max Müller strove to reach back to examine the origins of Buddhism. In order to do this he placed great stress on the role of ancient textual material. He thus produced a number of annotated translations of Buddhist texts. What he discovered was that Buddhism in its original form was a religion that was unsophisticated, devoid of mythological speculations, and based upon firm ethical principles. In fact, he described ancient Buddhism as not being a religion at all but a social and moral code of a very high quality (1898a, p.217). That early form of Buddhism, he believed, had degenerated over the years when it abandoned its focus on ethics alone. The original teachings of the Buddha, Max Müller said, had been overlooked following the importation of metaphysical speculations, such as *karma* and *samsara*, from the philosophical school of Sankhya (1898a, p.222).

There are a number of echoes of Max Müller's work in Carpenter's writings. As will be read later in this chapter, Carpenter also believed that Buddhism had begun as a code of ethics that had been converted over time into a culture of metaphysical speculations. This idea was pursued in his book, *The Passage of Buddhism from a System of Ethical Culture to an Idealistic Theism* (1904a). According to Carpenter, Gautama's teachings were summed up in his affirmation that there was a "self-acting Right" that secured to everyone what they deserved. After death the moral products of one's action remained to the benefit of another being who then carried on the succession. Later forms of Buddhism, said Carpenter, absorbed the Brahmin concept of the Maha-Purusha and introduced metaphysical ideas into Buddhism. Discussion around the person of the Buddha thereby changed the nature of Buddhism. Its character as an ethical system thus gave way to something based far more on mythology (1904a, pp.5-

11). For Carpenter, the changes in Buddhism brought about more complex consequences. Changes were necessary as part of the evolutionary developments in all religious cultures. As well as degeneration, there was also the laying of foundations for the creation of a more advanced form of Buddhism.

Carpenter's work also resembled Max Müller's as regards the belief in the steady progress of humanity, or, as Carpenter put it, "a progressive revelation of ever brightening truth" (1910d, p.5). Again, Carpenter's thesis was a little more complex. Evolutionary progress was not orderly and the evolutionary changes within the different religions themselves meant that it was not justifiable to place the religions into a neat gradient of advancing cultures. For Carpenter humanity was advancing slowly and not in a steady line of progress but along "divers paths towards clearer truth" (1913a, p.507). There were thus forms of Hinduism, the Brahmo Samaj for example, that were at a more advanced stage of evolution than those forms of Buddhism that focused on speculations on the person of the Buddha.

Carpenter shared with Max Müller also the belief in a single religious consciousness that manifested itself in different ways. For Carpenter there was within the human person a natural instinct to seek after God. Carpenter came to this conclusion after comparing the faith and practice of Buddhism and Christianity (1924a). Quoting from Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), Carpenter said that "the divine Life is not One but Many" (1924a, p.307). According to Carpenter, the differences between Buddhism and Christianity were to be explained by the different literary cultures that indicated that religious understanding was expressed in diverse forms. In Carpenter's view, Christianity as a whole was more advanced than Buddhism because of its closer realisation of the realities behind those expressions. Unitarian Christianity was the most advanced because it stripped away the cultural differences that focused on metaphysical aspects of religion and saw the connections between itself and other religions that would enable a future coming together.

Carpenter was part of that Victorian culture that sought to place Buddhism in some kind of scheme of human progress. In his works he expressed a familiarity with the work of a number of scholars who he believed represented that position: Colebrook, Jones, and Turnour (1911b, pp.45f). Carpenter, however, had his own development of that approach that placed Buddhism into a scheme of evolutionary development that included Unitarianism as a vehicle for the future creation of a new religious manifestation.

Unitarian Scholars

There are two Unitarian scholars whose work should be noted in connection with Carpenter's approach to Buddhism, James Freeman Clarke and Richard Acland Armstrong (1843-1905). Clarke was one of those American Unitarians whose adherence to the Transcendentalist Movement had led them to seek a new non-dogmatic form of religion. Buddhism, as they saw it, had a high moral code, yet was free of doctrinal detail. They revered Buddhism as a step towards a future universal faith based upon the best elements of all the world's religions (Williams, 1967, pp.84-85). Carpenter was well aware of Clarke's work, something that Carpenter said "gave proof of his insight and his faculty of reconciliation". Such qualities, said Carpenter, were displayed "with notable breadth" and were responsible for bringing the knowledge of religions such as Buddhism within the reach of ordinary readers (1925a, p.16).

Clarke's agenda was concerned with demonstrating how other religions were incomplete markers towards a future universal religion. In his view only Christianity, purified from its corrupted, institutionalised forms and rooted in the ethics and religion of Jesus, was capable of becoming the culmination to which the other religions only pointed. He considered Buddhism as one of the "catholic" religions that had reached a higher plane of spiritual development than the religions of "ethnic nationalism", such as Hinduism and the ancient religions of Egypt, Greece, Rome and Scandinavia. Buddhism

was just one of those religions, alongside Judaism, Islam and Zoroastrianism, that would be replaced by ideal Christianity when the latter would teach all the truths it taught but would supply what it had omitted (1871, p.31).

Clarke felt that Buddhism was an advance on Hinduism because of its rejection of Hinduism's caste system, a system that he said was oppressive and a denial of human equality. His belief that Buddhism was less advanced than Christianity was based upon his concern that Buddhism had not developed into a theistic religion. To Clarke, theism was at the heart of ideal Christianity.

Buddhism has lost the idea of the Infinite and Eternal. It loves humanity, but omits the love of an infinite God... Christianity has shown an all-sidedness which marks it for a still larger catholicity hereafter (1883, pp.361-363).

Clarke viewed Buddhism as a religion that had had an original capacity to reflect upon the source of life but had yet to take the step that would lead to acknowledgement of a divine dimension. The Buddhist was, he said, "neither deist nor atheist: he has no theology" (1869, p.728). Clarke's evolutionary scheme meant an eventual coming together of the religions, but this would be when there was a universal acceptance of a monotheistic basis for the faith of the future.

One aspect of Clarke's theology that makes him stand out from other Unitarians of his day is his individualistic faith. Though he believed in a practical and an ethical religion, he did not develop the idea of a social religion that focused on the community. He certainly believed in the efficacy and importance of good works and he thus created a doctrine of salvation by works rather than one of salvation by faith, the latter being a perversion of Jesus's teachings. Salvation by good works in society was the traditional view of Unitarians, and this was a major contrast to the mainstream Christian view of salvation by faith. Clarke, however, took a third position. For him, salvation was achieved by the cultivation of individual character. For him, good works in society

simply strengthened the individual character. Individualism was at the heart of Clarke's theology and this highly individual approach was pursued and fully expounded in a major article on self-culture (1880). Clarke's focus on the individual led him to portray Buddhism as a religion expounding the need for personal salvation based upon one's conduct towards others. This was enshrined, he felt, in the doctrine of rebirth that encouraged the individual to act in such a way that one's personal future was guaranteed (1869, p.725).

Carpenter's position was a total contrast to Clarke's. For Carpenter, the ideal religion was profoundly social. It looked beyond concerns of the individual to the creation of a communal identity. The religion of the future was, for Carpenter, focused on the concerns for the infirm, for humane treatment of offenders and for the establishment of a new social order wherein individuals could work out their own salvation. The advanced religion was the one that "points to large transformations and reconstructions as the principle of mutual service... becomes the higher law of life" (1911b, p.110). Buddhism, he felt, manifested this aspect of the ideal religion Carpenter anticipated.

What Clarke meant for the study of Buddhism, in Carpenter's view, was that the religion could be placed within some general plan of evolution. For Clarke the evolutionary progress made by humanity stopped with liberal Christianity and he felt it necessary to display a good deal of distance between the two religions. Carpenter felt no such need. For him there was continual movement and Buddhism displayed a greater advance than Clarke acknowledged. There were some similarities between the two approaches, however. They both acknowledged different religions as representing different stages of evolution. They both saw Buddhism as an advance on Hinduism. They also both posited the notion of an ideal religion of the future. Where they differed was in the content of that future religion. For Clarke it would be based upon a purer form of Christianity that was focused on Jesus's teachings and that eschewed the formal

doctrines of the Church. For Carpenter, as will be further considered, it was something that could not yet be clearly defined, but liberal Christianity was the stage at which progress could be identified only at the present phase of development.

There were other Unitarians who explored Buddhism and whose works were familiar to Carpenter. Armstrong is of some significance in this regard. A celebrated minister and social reformer, he was also a lay theologian who sought to expound religious studies in a non-technical way. His popularity, particularly in Unitarian circles, was due to his ability to combine sound scholarship and careful research with an appealing writing style that benefited the reader unversed in the language of theology and philosophy (Mellone, 1923, p.123).

Armstrong had been a fellow student of Carpenter's at Manchester New College and their families had had a long connection. Armstrong's father, the Rev. George Armstrong (1792-1857), had been a junior minister serving with Carpenter's grandfather, Lant Carpenter, in Bristol. Carpenter and Armstrong had continued their post-college friendship and they spent much time together (Wrigley, 1936, p.18).

Unlike Carpenter, Armstrong's interest lay mainly in Christology and his writings were largely connected with this subject or with reflections on the nature of the Godhead (Armstrong, 1881; 1890; 1894; 1906). When only 27 years of age, however, Armstrong wrote a significant article for the *Theological Review* comparing Theravada Buddhism with Christianity (1870). He based his researches, as did Carpenter, on written texts rather than on encounter with followers of the religion, though it has to be said that it would not have been feasible for him to visit Buddhist countries at that time.

Armstrong's starting point was his belief in something he called "ultimate Christianity" (Reprint 1923, p.127), the belief in the guiding hand of a supreme deity. This absolute religion, though given the name of Christianity, was less dependent on Christian teaching than on the idea of a unifying omnipresent energy. Armstrong was thus less committed to upholding Christianity as superior and open to the possibility of

other paths to truth. On the other hand, Armstrong believed in a general revelation, a religious awareness available to all, something that could become clouded by "torpor brought on by the mundane" (Reprint 1923, p.125). Organised religion could therefore stifle this inbuilt religious consciousness and pervert its basic values. Buddhism was, he believed, a basically valuable path of insight that had lost its way.

Armstrong believed in an ideal Buddhism, the teachings of the Buddha having been perverted over time. He felt that what had sullied this original Buddhism was Eastern mythology and speculations on the person of the Buddha. The only remnant of original Buddhism, he felt, was the character of the Buddha himself, someone of courage, humility and gentleness (1870, p.184). The teachings of the Buddha, devised at a time of protest against the tyranny of the Brahmin priesthood and the imposition of the caste system (1870, pp.176-178), had now been distorted into pointless speculations on the nature of the Buddha's person, something he called "weird absurdities" (1870, p.199).

Armstrong believed in an original noble Buddhism but felt that its modern manifestation did not do full justice to the Buddha's ideals. Armstrong felt that Buddhism had developed into a pessimistic religion, but he blamed this, somewhat surprisingly, on the oppressive nature of the Eastern climate as the hot sun "forced men to crouch enervated on the ground and curse their lives" (1870, p.176). He referred to Buddhism as an atheistic religion: "this Buddhism exhibits to us not one, but innumerable communities born, bred, dying without thought or desire of God" (1870, p.198). He believed Buddhism to be pessimistic because of the concept of *nirvana* that he felt implied annihilation. Having worked among the urban poor he pointed out how they had expressed no reference to God and looked to death and annihilation as a blessing (1870, p.187). Nonetheless, Buddhism was for Armstrong a religion of compassion and selflessness (1870, p.185).

Although Armstrong and Carpenter maintained their relationship throughout their lives, their interests were very different. Armstrong did not pursue his studies of Buddhism to the same degree as Carpenter. Nevertheless, there are aspects of Armstrong's study of Buddhism that parallel those of Carpenter. Carpenter shared his friend's view of an ancient form of Buddhism that had deteriorated owing to the increased speculation regarding the person of the Buddha. Carpenter also shared Armstrong's view that a belief in God was essential in advanced religion. The major and fundamental difference between them, however, was the implication in Armstrong's thesis that Buddhism was a closed system that had ceased to develop. Carpenter celebrated the fact that Buddhism could also evolve within itself and manifest a purer form that was not concerned with unnecessary speculations. Carpenter also believed that there was room within Buddhism for the development of a theistic position. The points of difference between the two friends allowed for a sharpening up of Carpenter's evolutionary approach to Buddhism and the working out of a justification for Buddhism's position within his scheme.

The Evolutionary Status of Buddhism

Carpenter's belief that Buddhism was an advanced religion when compared with Hinduism, though less advanced than Christianity, can be understood when his criteria for advanced religion, as introduced in Chapter 3, are applied to Buddhism. How Buddhism succeeds in claiming an advanced status after such an application will now be considered along with Carpenter's application of his principle of internal evolution.

1. The Centrality of Ethics

A major characteristic of an advanced religion in Carpenter's evolutionary scheme was one that allowed mythological aspects to lose prominence to the centrality of ethics (1914b, p.3). According to Carpenter, a universal agreement on the place of

ethics would ultimately unite all the religions (1911b, p.111). He claimed that all religions were founded in different ways for the working out of ethical values (1906a, p.504). All religions were then to be judged in accordance with how far they had retained their devotion to a moral code. An advanced religion was one that could merge with other religions because of a shared concern for the centrality of ethics. It is with this principle in mind that Carpenter examined Buddhism.

In Carpenter's view, Buddhism had the potential for uniting with other religions because it bore a fundamental ethical character. In an essay first published in 1884 he said that the mission of Buddhism was to infuse a vital moral energy. This would lead the individual to express "right views, right feelings, right words, and right conduct" (1903c, p.218). He suggested that the rapid growth of Buddhism in its early days was a result of its presentation of a new moral ideal (1890d, p.194). Indeed, the *raison d'être* of Buddhist teachings was the furtherance of moral values. "Early Buddhism is really a system of ethical culture, and the conception entertained of its founder is strictly humanitarian" (1911b, p.50).

Though Buddhism had become overburdened with later mythological speculations, its literature still contained "an intense moral passion" (1921b, p.38). This stress on ethics meant, according to Carpenter, that there were other positive consequences of Buddhism. It taught self-denial, patience, forbearance and charity (1911b, p.93) and its ethical zeal led to a promotion of education, art and culture (1906a, p.508). It gave the individual a belief in tremendous human possibilities as it put the onus for endeavour and human progress upon people. Carpenter contrasted this with the way that some forms of Christianity undervalued human effort, seeing God as the initiator of all advancement and ignoring human potentialities. "Buddhism is what man could do, Christianity was about what God had done for man" (1924a, p.148). Despite accusations that Buddhism taught a doctrine of selfishness, it was, according to Carpenter, an ethical system that sought to cultivate character (1924a, p.135). Thus, it

was at an advanced stage of development and moving towards a position where religious merger, based on shared ethical values, was viable.

Connected with Carpenter's concern for the centrality of ethics was his belief that ethics involved a fight against sin. This use of the concept of sin as bound up with ethics can be found throughout his writings and he believed that dealing with human sin was a central issue in Buddhism. In a very early article, originally produced in 1884, he described Buddhism as being concerned with "warfare with sin" (1903c, p.222). In another article he described "deliverance from sin" as being "the central conception" of Buddhism (1905b, p.20). In a feature on Japanese Buddhism he referred to the "sickness" of sin (1906a, p.513). This focus on Buddhism as being concerned with sin was dealt with in a number of other works over a number of years (1910a, pp.462/470; 1911b, p.49; 1913a, p.499). As late as 1924 he was writing about the *nirmana-kaya* being specially created for the conquering of sin (1924a, p.253).

Identifying ethics with sin and presenting Buddhism as being concerned with sin in this way was very much a Christian approach. The idea of sin is not a usual feature of Buddhist writings. The nearest Buddhist equivalent is *dukkha*, one of the three so-called "marks of existence", usually referred to as "suffering" but more freely translated as "unsatisfactoriness" (Chryssides, 1988, p.152). There is a connection between "sin" and "*dukkha*" in that they are both fundamental conditions into which one is born and from which one should endeavour to escape. There is thus no surprise as to why Carpenter found a parallel here. It is also necessary to remember that Christian comparisons at the time were fairly common. Carpenter was part of that tradition although he did not go to the same extremes as some of his contemporaries. He did not claim, for example, that Buddhists were only interested in their own condition, that they sought to deal with their own moral state and ignored the sinful nature of the rest of humanity. Buddhism was often portrayed as a religion of self-interest. Clarke, for example, conceived of

Buddhism as resting on pure individualism, "each man's object is to save his own soul" (1869, p.727).

For Carpenter, an advanced religion sought an "Order of Righteousness" (1910d, p.2) where the lack of regard for the welfare of others was to be replaced by self-sacrifice (1905b, p.21). This is how he regarded Buddhism, as an essentially ethical culture that struggled against human sins that were fostered by social injustice. As such he credited it with an advanced status in his evolutionary scheme.

2. *Social Progress*

Connected with the centrality of ethics was the extension of ethical values to an awareness of the needs of the whole community. It was therefore vital, in Carpenter's scheme, for an advanced religion to seek to improve social conditions (1910c, p.4; 1912b, p.7; 1916a, p.78). In an article in *The Inquirer* he made a claim for the Church to become a major vehicle for the transformation of society (1880c). Another work of Carpenter's, an edited collection of sermons and addresses by his uncle, Russell Lant Carpenter (1817-1892), dealt with the successes of Christianity in improving social conditions (1893a). In "World Ethics and the Common Good" (1924b), he argued for the centrality of social ethics in world affairs. Thus, Buddhism was to be judged as to how far this virtue could be identified within its teachings and practices.

Carpenter's response was that Buddhism had originally been concerned with social progress but that this virtue had been sidelined by metaphysical speculations. In an address to his students in 1887, "The Study of Theology and the Service of Man" Carpenter told the story of a benevolent king, referred to as Great Victor. The king performed no sacrifice until all his people had been provided with essential goods and the ability to grow their own food (1903c, p.303). Herein lay, said Carpenter, the evidence that Buddhism had exercised social awareness at an early stage. He believed

that social awareness was an integral part of early Buddhist teaching as it had been marked by “a peculiar type of devotion to the welfare of others” (1883a, III, p.17).

Carpenter’s understanding of Buddhism did not allow him to appreciate the complexity of this issue. Buddhism did not deal with the question as to whether or not it was a religion concerned with social awareness. Social responsibility was not a focus of Buddhist religion, but if the right principles were adopted then actions beneficial to social cohesion would naturally follow. Carpenter’s difficulty with Buddhism was that it seemed to him to be overly concerned with issues of individuality. Though he did stress the importance of the individual (1903c, p.359) he nonetheless believed in the need to consider individual existence in the context of one’s social environment. Human progress was impossible without the transformation of society (1903c, p.216). He saw Buddhism as being focused on internal change. This meant that an individual looked out upon the world from the security of one’s own existence with no real connection with what one saw. The Buddhist thus displayed “compassion” and “pity” for the victims of social injustice (1903c, p.359). Monotheistic religion, however, taught that every human being bore a particle of the divine. To serve God was to serve all humanity in whatever state they existed. In Carpenter’s view the voice of God spoke within to demand justice and the suppression of evil. Such religion thus necessarily involved the demand for the redemption of society (1903c, p.359).

That Buddhism was not concerned with social reform was a belief strongly held by a number of scholars in the Victorian period. According to Almond (1988, p.75), this was due initially to the claims made by Oldenberg in his book *Buddha: his Life, his Doctrine, his Order* (1882). Almond’s case depended upon the belief that there was a deeper explanation. In his view there was an attempt to protect the elevated status of the Buddha from the growth of socialist ideas that were perceived to threaten English society (1988, p.75). Any claims that Buddha sought social reform were thus to be rejected. Carpenter went along with this assessment despite the case made by Fairbairn,

for example, that Oldenberg had failed to differentiate the teachings of Buddhism and Brahmanism (Fairbairn, 1885, p.439). The apparent neglect of social conditions in Brahmanism, said Fairbairn, was not replicated in Buddhism.

3. Abandonment of Mythology

As noted in Chapter 3, Carpenter believed that the striving after ethical values, and the practice of them in the wider society, was prevented from being fully realised by dependence upon what he felt was unnecessary mythology. On this criterion, Buddhism would seemingly have failed. Buddhism still retained what Carpenter believed were ancient myths (1912b, p.6). In his "How Japanese Buddhism Appeals to a Christian Theist" he listed the mythological elements of Buddhism that he referred to as features of "popular Buddhism". These included the miraculous births and lives of saints, the struggles with demons, the visits by angels, and the existence of miraculous and abnormal occurrences (1906a, p.511). In another essay he referred to the outdated mythologies concerning walking on water, the transfiguration of the body of the Buddha, and earthquake and thunder following Gautama's death (1924a, pp.178-179).

Carpenter believed that Christianity was at a more advanced stage than Buddhism yet there were similar mythologies in some Christian traditions. Carpenter claimed that there was little difference between "popular Buddhism" and Roman Catholicism (1906a, p.512). This claim was typical of the period when some scholars cited a number of similarities between Buddhist and Roman Catholic practice. The presence of images, the use of candles, incense, and bells together with the veneration of relics were all cited as practices held in common (Almond, 1988, p.123). Rhys Davids, for example, found numerous parallels, including "mystic rites and ceremonies performed by shaven priests in gorgeous robes", "worship of virgins, saints and angels", and "confessions, fasts and purgatory" (1897, p.193).

It was not only scholars but also Roman Catholic missionaries who spotted apparent similarities between Roman Catholicism and Buddhism (Almond, 1988, p.124). Though Buddhists claimed that the use of images was not to be interpreted as idolatry, the images being venerated rather than worshipped, there were interpreters of Buddhism who felt that idolatry was rife nonetheless. This was the case, for example, with Clarke (1869, p.713) and Rhys Davids (1877, p.438).

There were ways in which Carpenter was able to come to terms with Buddhism's mythology whilst believing it still to be an advanced religion. Firstly, the theory of internal evolution meant that mythological aspects of Buddhism could be regarded as having been outdated. In this way, Protestantism had replaced Roman Catholicism, and this in its turn had been replaced by Unitarianism. Thus Christianity was an advanced religion by virtue of the fact that it was able to move beyond its mythological aspects. Similarly, "primitive Buddhism" had been replaced by Japanese Pure Land Buddhism with its rejection of a complex mythology in favour of an emphasis on faith (1924a, p.299).

The second consideration was that the mythology of Buddhism was only something of a façade, the inevitable accumulation of popular superstition that was not an essential part of the religion. Carpenter did not deny that the mythology of Buddhism was connected to an early period in the religion's history. There was, however, a type of Buddhist religion that existed behind the metaphors of the mythological symbols. Carpenter referred to certain elements concerning ethics, philosophical reflection on the nature of reality and religious speculation. These concerns could be separated from the mythology of Buddhism and were considered to be the essentials. It was the work of these concerns that enabled Buddhism to evolve into a religion promoting a "universal spirit", the belief in an infinite and eternal object of worship (1906a, p.512).

4. *The Conquering of Ignorance*

In Carpenter's view, mythology existed because of the state of ignorance experienced by the followers of a particular religion. According to Carpenter, Buddhism was a major step forward as far as human virtues were concerned as it called for a restoration of knowledge and a rebuttal of ignorance (1913a, p.499). A major essay on Buddhism dealing with this aspect was his contribution to the *Hibbert Journal*, "How Japanese Buddhism Appeals to a Christian Theist" (1906a). This was written in response to an earlier article, "How Christianity Appeals to a Japanese Buddhist" (Anesaki, 1905) by a Japanese academic, Masaharu Anesaki (1873-1949). Anesaki's claim was that Buddhism's central tenet was the conviction of pain and impermanence and that enlightenment consisted in the "intellectual conviction of the truth" (1905, pp.3-4).

In a later article Carpenter assessed the Pure Land form of Buddhism and applied the same criterion of a conquering of ignorance. He asserted that "salvation by faith" in that tradition involved the conveyance to the believer of knowledge. Faith in Amitabha, he said, brought "an instant Mass of Absolute Truth" (1910b, p.654). Ignorance in Buddhism is the same delusion, a lack of awareness of the true nature of things, or of the true meaning of existence. If Carpenter considered this an important indicator of an advanced stage of evolutionary development then it is clear why he believed Buddhism was qualified for that status. The criterion of a conquering of ignorance had been satisfied.

The difficulty for Carpenter in making his claims about Buddhism's rebuttal of ignorance is that he believed that, in this regard, Buddhism was enforcing the same lessons as Christianity (1906a, p.504). It would be unusual to claim that ignorance was a major concern within mainstream Christianity, unless it is accepted as hardness of heart or a refusal to be awakened to the gospel message. In Buddhism there is no similar understanding of ignorance. Buddhism acknowledges "ignorance" as "wrong view" or

of seeing the world in a wrong way. It requires, not a change of heart, but a different perspective on the world.

Buddhism would certainly satisfy Carpenter's criterion of conquering ignorance but only if one ignores the fundamental differences between the two religions as to what ignorance actually meant. Carpenter's response was to underline his distinctive understanding of ignorance that he felt was conquered by the virtue of "religious imagination" (1898a, p.63). Such a virtue was manifested only in the liberal Christian tradition to which his Unitarianism belonged. Knowledge in Carpenter's system was not to be acquired by means of revelation, miracles or the belief in divine inspiration. He believed that even philosophical speculation had its limits and inconsistencies (1898a, p.63). Traditional Christianity had been overly concerned with a literal interpretation of ignorance and knowledge. The scripturalism of traditional Christianity, and even of early Unitarianism, now gave way to a new form of knowledge and insight (1925a, p.12). This conquering of ignorance did not depend on formal knowledge, nor did it rely upon reason alone, but was a moral intuition. In Carpenter's view Buddhism shared this approach, that there was an insight gained by "religious imagination" that could combat ignorance and lead to a knowledge that conveyed the genuine nature of the world and its meaning, something that Carpenter called "the eye of truth" (1898a, p.70).

In Carpenter's scheme, therefore, Buddhism scored highly in terms of its conquering of ignorance as it shared something that Unitarian Christianity held. In this regard Buddhism could even be regarded as more advanced than traditional Christianity.

5. Universal Personal Salvation

Carpenter's affirmation of universal personal salvation as a major criterion of advanced religion was due to his belief that evolution implied the continuing development of human character, even after death. For Carpenter this meant that there was no extinction of a human soul as God would thereby be in a continual state of

bereavement. Evolution was about a continual process of spiritual education and for God to be vindicated this meant that every human soul had to complete the course (1903c, p.144). Universal personal salvation was therefore crucial as it enabled the individual to continue to grow in virtue.

Who can shrink from their [i.e. humanity's] summons to perpetual endeavour, who turn aside from the gracious invitation which they bring from the Father of our spirits? (1903c, p.147).

With Buddhism, however, Carpenter had a problem regarding universal personal salvation. He knew that Buddhism taught some kind of continuance when a deceased life could influence the life that followed. "After death, unseen potencies begot a new person, psychologically continuous with the deceased, to enjoy what the predecessor had prepared" (1924a, p.46). What this meant, as far as Carpenter could understand, was that there was no "eternal soul" (1924a, p.46). Instead, he believed that Buddhism taught the doctrine of annihilation (1903c, p.218).

Carpenter took a similar line to many other scholars of his day as regards the concept of *nirvana*. Though there were different views as to what the concept entailed, many scholars felt that it involved the total annihilation of the individual (Rhys Davids, 1876, p.434; Hardy, 1881, p.174; Barthélemy St. Hilaire, 1895, p.140). In other words, Buddhists endeavoured to bring about a cessation of their own cycle of existences. According to the aforementioned scholars, Buddhists therefore envisaged nothingness as the destiny for which one hoped. Understandably, the Victorians found the idea repugnant. There were some, however, who had a much firmer understanding of the soteriological aspect of the doctrine. Oldenberg recognised, for example, that the craving for eternal life, for sanctification, was an essential part of human existence (1882, p.284). He thus accepted that the concept of *nirvana* sat somewhere between annihilation and immortality.

Carpenter felt that Buddhism, in its earliest form, failed to satisfy this important criterion of an evolutionary advanced religion.

I shall not attempt to conceal my conviction that a philosophy which rejects the doctrine of a soul does not correctly interpret the facts of our self-consciousness (1903c, p.222).

Carpenter made a distinction, however, between the teachings of “primitive” Buddhism (1913a, p.500) and the “new doctrine” of salvation exemplified by the Pure Land tradition of Shinran that taught a kind of salvation guaranteed by a bestowal of faith granted by Amida (i.e. Amitabha) (1924a, p.298). Carpenter believed that the distinction between the two forms of Buddhism led to a doctrine involving a heavenly realm akin to that envisaged by Christianity. For Carpenter, the heavenly realm appeared to be a permanent home for human souls, a place of safety where all would dwell during which an apocalypse would destroy all evil (1910a, p.465). Thus, Carpenter was able to conceive of Pure Land Buddhism as holding to a belief in personal immortality similar to a Christianity understanding of it.

In order to appreciate Carpenter’s view of Buddhism and universal personal salvation it is necessary to note two points about Pure Land Buddhism and the concept of heaven in Protestant Christianity. Firstly, the Western Paradise did not have the same permanence as the Christian heaven. Those who believed in Amitabha would not instantly attain *nirvana* itself but would enter another realm, the Western Paradise. Unlike Pure Land Buddhism, Christianity does not have a plurality of afterlife existences although Roman Catholicism, with its doctrine of purgatory, could be considered as an exception in this regard. Protestantism, however, has always experienced repugnance at such a doctrine. The parallel is therefore a little strained.

Secondly, Amitabha’s deliverance is not from the misdeeds resulting from bondage of the will. Instead it is from the future rebirths in a world of suffering resulting from such misdeeds. The Christian concept of salvation is about bringing about an inner

change and new life, whereas the deliverance of Amitabha is determined by an individual's trust in his compassion. Although both purport to offer a direct passage to a paradise, the basis upon which the process is determined to be necessary is quite different. In the final analysis, Carpenter was able to claim that Buddhism had evolved a doctrine of universal personal salvation, at least in the Pure Land tradition. This enabled him to present Pure Land Buddhism as an advanced religion.

6. *Monotheism*

As universal personal salvation was, in Carpenter's view, closely connected to belief in a single, omnipotent personal God, monotheism was thus an integral criterion of advanced religion. Carpenter's most difficult struggle in assessing Buddhism's claims for evolutionary advanced status concerned his application of the criterion of monotheism. A religion needed to be monotheistic or to demonstrate a movement in that direction in order to be considered advanced. Carpenter's response was to portray Buddhism as moving towards monotheism by means of a number of different stages. The first stage involved the absence of God enshrined in the doctrine of *karma* that dealt with the world mechanically without the need for any divine intervention. The second stage focused upon the person of a deified Buddha in the same way as Christianity had associated Jesus Christ with God. The third stage involved an acceptance of the elevated Buddha, a figure who was not considered divine but whose role was to reveal God.

Carpenter accepted that *karma* was an essential part of ancient Buddhism (1906c, p.516). He acknowledged that it had a purpose for an earlier age. It highlighted the importance of absolute justice as a law of the world. It also underlined the significance of every thought and feeling, as they would ultimately account for something. This meant that every act of evil would be dealt with and harmony restored (1906c, pp.516-517). For Carpenter, however, the responsibility for evil was removed from individuals and correctional work was carried out automatically without divine

intervention. There would be no need for God if the consequences of human action were dealt with mechanically.

Carpenter admitted that there was a modification of the doctrine of *karma* in the Pure Land tradition. There the grace of Amitabha, he said, had an effect upon one's *karma*, harmonising with it to bring about salvation (1913b, p.246). Even so, in Carpenter's view, if there were a purpose to existence then it would be beyond the knowledge and understanding of God. In fact, Carpenter felt that there could be no real place for God in a karmic system, as there is therein no clear division between God and Nature (1906a, pp.519-520). For Carpenter the world was a place for the development of character where God would enable individuals to grow and develop as a preparation for the ultimate goal that God had yet to reveal. He felt that it was Christianity that allowed for divine and human initiative in restoring the damage done by human activity.

Despite Carpenter's views on the doctrine of *karma*, the fact that Buddhism did not display any theistic tendencies in its earliest forms is what was important to him. The second stage towards the monotheistic position that would secure Buddhism its advanced status came with the deification of the person of the Buddha. The third stage, recognition of the role of the Buddha in revealing God, but without being divine himself, was a stage that was only developing. To get to that stage meant abandoning the mythological speculations regarding the Buddha.

Carpenter's claim was that Buddhism had begun simply as an ethical culture that rejected all metaphysical speculation (1904a, p.5) It then transformed itself into a religion focused on the divine person of the Buddha. He believed that Buddhism had been influenced by certain speculative theories associated with Brahminism. Carpenter referred to the Maha-Purusha as being particularly responsible. The Maha-Purusha was envisaged, in the Rig Veda and later developed in the Upanishads, as a primal being. It was a sort of person-like reality, the Absolute, part of the larger reality that remained transcendent. He believed that Buddhism gradually took on Brahmin ideas about the

Maha-Purusha as the two religions developed side by side (1904a, pp. 1-8). These ideas, he said, were not characteristic of original Buddhism. He referred to the formless world of glory, akin to Paradise, which Gautama spoke about as being something adopted from Brahminism. "Buddhism proper has of course no room for this order of existences" (1904a, p.8). The notion of pre-birth conditions for future buddhas was, said Carpenter, a Brahmin concept. "We are here on the track of ideas quite inconsistent with the proper Buddhist psychology" (1904a, p.9). The whole idea of the Maha-Purusha was, said Carpenter, "not acceptable to early Buddhism" (1904a, p.9).

This second stage of development implied identification of the Buddha with the Absolute and the Eternal. It involved the creation of stories about the Buddha's life events and complex metaphysical explanations for the status of his person. It ignored the humanity of the man and turned him into a divine being who was not part of the world but was above and beyond the world, a being that only appeared to be human.

The phenomenal appearance of the Buddha is then explained as a semblance, after the manner of early Christian Docetism, and the aim of the believer is to become a partaker of the Buddha-nature (1902a, p.43).

Such deification of the Buddha was an outdated notion, said Carpenter, in the same way that traditional Christianity had become outdated by Unitarianism.

Adoration is directed to him; by prayer, by study of the scriptures, by meditation in holy places, the devout Buddhist enters into living communion with his heavenly Lord; and some of the different experiences of the Evangelist and the Catholic Christian are reproduced in similar types *sub specie Buddhae* (1911b, p.51).

Carpenter believed that the third stage in the development of Buddhism towards monotheism was a parallel to the growth of Unitarianism out of traditional Christianity. For Unitarians, Jesus was a human figure with a unique place in Christian history. Jesus

could be referred to as "Messiah" in an honorary sense as he most clearly bore the divine characteristics that could be witnessed in all human beings. The position of Jesus was justified by his teachings, the quality of which were such that Carpenter felt that Jesus had a relevance for the whole human race (1907c, p.148). In this way Jesus's role was to bear witness to God's existence and God's rule.

Carpenter believed that the exaltation of the Buddha, in the same way that Unitarians had exalted Jesus, would result in giving new strength and authority to the Buddha's teachings. He felt that such an authoritative figure could enable the devotee to search beyond the source of that authority and thus become aware of God. This, he believed, was what had happened in the Pure Land tradition. Although Pure Land Buddhism acknowledged doctrinal elements, such as the doctrine of the *trikaya* for example, they were not needed, Carpenter believed, for the practice of Buddhism. This was why Carpenter was able to compare Pure Land Buddhism with Unitarian Christianity in that they both eschewed the need for dependence on doctrines (1905b, p.20). This was not in fact true of the Pure Land Buddhist position but it is quite clearly the understanding of it that Carpenter had. Thus, the Pure Land tradition represented the third stage in Carpenter's process of attaining a monotheistic position. There was between Pure Land Buddhism and Unitarian Christianity, he believed, "a thousand harmonies of aspiration and trust" (1906a, p.503). Pure Land Buddhism was only a symbol of how Buddhism as a whole was developing. For Carpenter, Buddhism was on the way to a full monotheistic position. "Buddhism will change in the future. Popular Buddhism will no longer satisfy" (1906a, p.526).

7. The Criterion of Joy

As monotheism had been integral to advanced religion, so was the joy that came with the reality of the existence of that one God. The criterion of joy was where Buddhism failed in Carpenter's eyes, however, to be as advanced as Christianity. In this

regard he was well within the tradition of his Victorian contemporaries. Monier-Williams, for example, considered Buddhism as a morbid form of pessimism (1889, p.56) whilst *The Buddha and his Religion* characterised it as a religion with a “deep and miserable melancholy” (Barthélemy St Hilaire, 1895, p.158). Even Unitarians were apt to characterise Buddhism in this way. The American Unitarian James Bixby contrasted the cheerful Christian view of life in which Christ proclaimed that he came that all people might have life, with a Buddhism that pessimistically declared that life in itself was evil (1890, p.556).

Carpenter’s judgment of Buddhism as being joyless was dependent upon the doctrine of impermanence. He compared this with the great sense of joy found within Christianity and its security in God’s eternity. In his early career, Carpenter found an analogous doctrine of impermanence in some Christian philosophical schools such as Augustine’s. He felt that the extremes of such a concept were tempered by the historical situation and by human experience (1903c, p.213). In his writings later in his career Carpenter interpreted the doctrine of impermanence as being something particularly negative. In Buddhist teaching, he said, all was transitory and this would lead, he believed, to a sense of doom (1924a, p.85).

Buddhism, however, claimed to bring, not a sense of doom, but hope. Buddhism has always denied that it is essential to believe in one’s permanent state to enjoy faith and contentment. There were two factors involved here that related to two other criteria for advanced religion, monotheism and personal continuance after death. An advanced religion for Carpenter was one that taught a personal permanence dependent upon a relationship with God. Carpenter could not detect this in Buddhism. He felt that the Buddhist insistence on the transitory nature of the person and the denial of any individual continuance was a cause of gloom. It was also a reason for Buddhism to be considered inferior to Christianity (1903c, p.222).

In Carpenter's view, all aspects of religion were subject to the principle of evolution. This meant that religions in themselves were able to manifest different stages in evolutionary development. It was thus difficult to portray religions as representative of different evolutionary stages owing to the fact that the different forms of them were developing at different speeds. Carpenter therefore had to appraise a religion as a whole by considering what all its various manifestations had in common. Otherwise he had to isolate different forms of a religion and appraise them individually. With Buddhism he took both approaches.

The pinnacle of evolutionary development in Buddhism, in Carpenter's view, was Pure Land Buddhism. He portrayed Pure Land Buddhism as an advance on "original Buddhism" in that it placed the believer in direct relation with an Infinite and Eternal object of worship (1906a, p.512). Carpenter showed how the principle of internal evolution even operated within Pure Land Buddhism. This occurred when the teachings of Shinran (1173-1262) improved on those of Honen (1133-1212). Honen had been criticised for attaching too much value to the role of good works. In contrast, Shinran's teachings stressed the role of the gift of faith that was granted, said Carpenter, out of "immeasurable love" (1924a, p.299). In Carpenter's view it was possible for other new forms of Buddhism to develop in the light of greater knowledge and fresh experience (1906a, p.526).

Carpenter's presentation of the Pure Land tradition as the most evolutionary advanced manifestation of Buddhism so far was paralleled with Unitarianism, the movement he believed to be the most advanced form of Christianity so far. Carpenter described Unitarianism in this way because he believed it to be a form of Christianity that had moved on from what he considered a reliance on irrational embellishments obscuring the central tenets of Christianity. For example, Unitarianism retained the fundamental principles taught by Jesus whilst rejecting the speculations on his person.

Pure Land Buddhism was similarly an evolutionary advance on earlier forms of Buddhism because it retained what he considered was Buddhism's basis whilst rejecting speculation on the person of the Buddha.

So the 'ethical culture' of the historical Gotama has been converted into a kind of Unitarian Evangelicalism from which the first Founder has been entirely eliminated, yet the central conception of deliverance from sin and suffering remains unchanged (1905b, p.20).

There is an important difference between the way that Carpenter portrayed Pure Land Buddhism and Unitarianism. The Pure Land tradition was, Carpenter believed, the most evolved manifestation of Buddhism. Unitarianism, however, was not just the most evolutionary advanced form of Christianity. Christianity was the most advanced religion, and Unitarian Christianity was therefore the most advanced form of any religion so far. Carpenter dealt with this by suggesting that the problem with Buddhism, even in its Pure Land form, was its insistence on retaining the doctrine of *karma*. Carpenter made clear that even the gift of grace awarded by Amitabha was not inevitably successfully received. All souls were not equally capable of receiving it as their conditions were dependent upon their individual *karma* (1910b, p.663).

An Appraisal

Having considered Carpenter's justification for classifying Buddhism as an evolutionary advanced religion, it is now necessary to consider the consequences of his attempt to fit Buddhism into his evolutionary scheme. It would be wrong to suggest that Carpenter's evolutionary scheme was a tidy and linear development plan. On the contrary, Carpenter's belief that the scheme was dependent upon human involvement and cooperation meant that progress was sporadic and sometimes regressive. This did not detract Carpenter from acknowledging a steady evolution that lay beneath the confusing picture that was religious and human history. Nonetheless, Carpenter's

attempt to fit Buddhism into his grand evolutionary scheme meant that his presentation of Buddhism was distinctive.

A major consequence of Carpenter's attempt to fit Buddhism into his evolutionary scheme is that the religion had to be presented in a manner that exemplified the notion of progression. Carpenter's criteria for an advanced religion meant that there were elements of a religion that were either ignored or presented in a way that accorded with his understanding of evolution. An example of this is how he dealt with the concept of "no self", known as *anatta*. He wrote of Buddhism as having rejected the idea of an individual soul (1903c, p.222). This would prove to be impossible to reconcile with his criterion of a universal personal salvation. He later wrote about the importance of the Self as experienced by the followers of the Buddha after his death. Memorials were set up and commemorations held. Carpenter pointed out that the Buddha's personality was enveloped in "pretensions", claims about his person that he made himself. These included the claim that the Buddha was the possessor of the knowledge of the whole universe and the guide for all beings (1921b, pp.34-35).

Carpenter appeared to ignore how Buddhism defined the concept of "no self". It was a concept that did not fit in easily with Carpenter's understanding of personal salvation. It was a profound and complex doctrine and Carpenter could find no simple way of integrating it into his evolutionary scheme. If he had considered it in greater detail he may have come to the conclusion that, on this particular issue, Buddhism could not claim an advanced status.

Carpenter's evolutionary scheme had a major impact on the way that the different manifestations of Buddhism were presented. Pure Land Buddhism, for example, displayed within itself some of the virtues that characterised it as more advanced than other forms of Buddhism. It was presented as a major departure from classical Buddhism. Carpenter represented the different sects of Buddhism almost as different religions with little connection between them. Thus, Carpenter identified what

he called "Popular Buddhism" with its emphasis on speculations about the person of the Buddha, "Philosophical Buddhism" with its denial of the phenomenal world, and "Theistic Buddhism" represented by the Pure Land tradition (1906a, pp.511-514).

The Pure Land tradition, with its parallels with Christianity, and particularly with Unitarian Christianity, was elevated to a position that made it appear superior to other forms of Buddhism. Carpenter saw this as evidence of an internal evolution that was taking place within Buddhism. He did present Pure Land Buddhism, however, as bearing little connection with what had gone before. In his view there was only one real connection, and that was the doctrine of *karma* (1910a, p.461). In this way he was able to assess Japanese Buddhism somewhat freed from its historical links with a form of Buddhism that Carpenter felt was outmoded. He did this in order to show how evolution can detach the essence of a religion from its mythological speculations. This strengthened his case for Unitarianism as a religion that had kept the essential teachings of Jesus after losing the unnecessary speculations about his person. Carpenter's form of Christianity was thus keeping a sharp distance from the heritage from which it arose.

The consequence for Carpenter's evolutionary scheme of presenting the different forms of Buddhism as if they were separate religions is that there necessarily appears an overlapping of Buddhism and Christianity. If Pure Land Buddhism bears certain features of advanced religion that are not displayed in mediaeval Christianity, for example, then the legitimacy of presenting the religions as different stages of evolution is called into question. Carpenter's only response to that issue was to consider the state of the different religions overall. Christianity was still superior because of its developed doctrine of monotheism, something not achieved fully in any form of Buddhism. Carpenter would not, however, have denied that some overlapping is inevitable as different communities developed at different speeds. Such a process, nevertheless, would not affect his overall plan for the evolution of humanity.

Carpenter's evolutionary scheme meant that Buddhism was presented in a way that allowed it to be judged according to Carpenter's preferred criteria for ideal religion. This was at the expense of the emphases raised by Buddhists themselves. Thus, Carpenter presented Buddhism as a religion bound up with the teaching of correct doctrines. These were primarily concerned with fighting ignorance and sin (1906a, p.504) and the working out of the consequences of *karma* (1906a, p.516). Buddhists themselves, however, would argue that they are not concerned with doctrine but with the practice of the *dharma* in order that things may be seen as they really are (Tejananda, 1994, p.1). Even Professor Anesaki, to whose article (1905) Carpenter's "How Japanese Buddhism Appeals to a Christian Theist" (1906a) was a response, acknowledged that there were fundamental differences between Buddhism and Christianity. In his view it was because of the intellectual basis of Buddhism. This was contrasted with the emotional foundations of Christianity with its dependence upon faith, hope and love (1905, p.4).

Carpenter's approach does have merit, however. His readers and students were members of a society where Buddhist practice was a rarity. Conveying its characteristics in such an environment required carefully chosen tools. For Carpenter this meant utilising concepts that would be well known. Evolution was a theory that dominated the Victorian era and to place Buddhism in an evolutionary scheme would inevitably have its attractions. It would enable the reader to view Buddhism sympathetically without there being a threat to their own position. The concentration on concepts that would be familiar to Christians would allow them to find a way into what the Victorians believed was a difficult and complex religion. The Victorians found it difficult to treat Buddhism, or any other Eastern religion, on its own terms. Buddhism could only be encountered from a position of the West's own "essential and unquestionable superiority" (Almond, 1988, p.36). This is what was allowed for by Carpenter's approach.

Conclusion

In assessing Carpenter's presentation of Buddhism one must remember the Victorian environment in which he worked. The judgment of the Victorians was that, as a religion, Buddhism was wanting. Carpenter's approach was somewhat different. He found Buddhism wanting also but to a different degree and in a different context. Where Buddhism was deficient was in its ability to represent the latest stages of evolutionary development. Christianity, said Carpenter, was also wanting in that there was some distance to travel before the ideal religious movement could be created. Buddhism merely represented a major step forward in religious development. Carpenter could then acknowledge the "flawed" aspects of Buddhism but at the same time show it as having a role in evolutionary progress. Ultimately, as will be considered in the final chapter, its role would be vindicated when, in Carpenter's scheme, the interaction of ideas and insights would serve to move humanity on to a fuller realisation of God's plan.

What Carpenter sought to do was to fit Buddhism into a grand scheme. It had a purpose in that it was an integral part of God's plan for humanity. As such it played its part in moving towards that fuller disclosure of the truth that would be fully manifested in the future. In the next chapter consideration is given to Carpenter's presentation of Hinduism as a stage of evolutionary development. Again, it will be possible to determine how Carpenter presented Hinduism in such a way as to elevate Unitarian Christianity as the most advanced stage on the evolutionary path.

CHAPTER 5

CARPENTER AND HINDUISM

Introduction

In Chapter 4 I dealt with Carpenter's most extensive and important work, his long time study of Buddhism. Carpenter also explored the field of Hinduism, however, though his work on Hinduism was not as extensive as his studies in Buddhism. In this chapter I will consider how Carpenter presented Hinduism in the light of his grand evolutionary scheme.

Carpenter's work on Hinduism is presented later than his work on Buddhism because Carpenter gave Hinduism less attention, because he had less regard for Hinduism than he did for Buddhism, and because he began seriously to study Hinduism sometime later than he did Buddhism. It is worth noting that Carpenter himself, in his great work *Theism in Medieval India*, also presented a history of Buddhism before moving on to a study of Hinduism (1921b). Carpenter focused specifically on Hinduism in no more than eight articles, though this did include a substantial study on the development of Hinduism through the ages (1921b). The other articles were mostly comparisons of Hinduism with other religions (1903c; 1917) or accounts of the teachings of Hindu reformers such as the Saivite poets of South India (1920) or Chaitanya (1921a). He also wrote a number of articles on the religions in general, such as *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World* (1911b), where Hinduism featured as part of a larger survey of the world's religions.

Carpenter's work on Hinduism covered the religion's history from the writing of the Vedas through to mediaeval India. He also gave some attention to the Brahmo Samaj (1912b), though this is not surprising in the light of his family connections with its

founders. As will be indicated, Carpenter believed that there was a genuine Hinduism that was existent in the Vedas. This pure faith had degenerated until the reformers began to reclaim their heritage. The Brahmo Samaj thus exemplified, in Carpenter's view, the fundamental character of that original Hindu faith.

In appraising the effectiveness of Carpenter's work on evolution and Hinduism it is necessary to consider the materials available to him and the extent of his knowledge of the subject. Once again, as with Buddhism, Carpenter treated Hinduism as a textual phenomenon. He did accept that Hinduism in its contemporary manifestation was determined by other than written works. He referred, for example, to the social mores and considerations of race and caste that gave it its character (1921b, p.124). Carpenter, however, believed that this was not genuine Hinduism. Hinduism in its genuine form was to be discovered in its rich literary heritage. He therefore assessed the religion in the light of the whole collection of documents, including the ancient texts, such as the Vedas (1923, pp.715f) and the Upanishads (1920, p.471), and the later writings of poets such as the Saivite Manikka Vacagar (1920, pp.475f).

Although Carpenter encountered Hinduism by means of its texts it should be noted that his knowledge of them was restricted to what was available to the Western scholar at the time. He did display an understanding of what was included in the documents and was capable of commenting upon their significance (1920, p.471; 1923, pp.714f). He was not, however, a Sanskrit scholar. He had a clear understanding of quite a number of Sanskrit words and expressions as is evidenced by detailed explanations in, for example, *Theism in Medieval India* (1910c, pp.190-194; pp.202-206). He did not, however, have the same kind of linguistic skills that he had with Pali. He had not had a relationship with a teacher of the subject as he had had with Rhys Davids, the scholar who inspired him to master Pali. Carpenter was thus dependent upon Western scholarship to provide translation and commentary.

The concept of Hinduism as it was understood by the West, in the period in which Carpenter was working, is that it was a religion based on ancient sacred texts. In its popular form, as the West understood it, it portrayed itself as polytheistic. At its heart, however, it was believed to be a form of pantheism, the doctrine that all the deities, and all the great forces and operations of nature were direct manifestations of an all-pervading divine energy. God and nature, it was believed, were identical. The underlying principle of all life was *karma*, a principle that encouraged a certain degree of moral behaviour in that one's future lives would be determined by conduct in the present life. The scholars of Carpenter's time, however, tended to claim that the doctrine impressed itself with little effect upon the Indian mind. Hindu doctrines, it was felt, encouraged indifference, passivity and unconsciousness. "Men work out their own end. There is no almighty power who orders, directs, and is in sympathy with mankind" (Lyall, 1908, p.124).

Hinduism did tend to be presented in something of a negative light. Oldenberg, for example, considered it incapable of teaching a code of ethics. It did have the potential to change and evolve but, in its contemporary form, it was considered as a primitive and unsophisticated religion.

This step of incomparable importance in the evolution of religion – the association of ideas of God and good – as yet can be described in but a few faint signs, and this state most surely marks the religion as still a barbaric one (Oldenberg, 1898, p.70).

Hinduism was thus considered a primitive religion that had a profound literature. Some writers of the last century separated out the literature from the practice, implying that the literature was the inheritance of the whole human race. Emerson and the Transcendentalists were typical of this approach. One modern essay has claimed that it was a common feature of the last century to separate the earliest Vedic texts from the later Hindu tradition beginning with the Brahmana-texts. These earlier Vedic texts were

then appropriated and presented in such a way as to be representative of a world-wide heritage. Such documents were to be clearly distinguished from the mythology of later Hinduism (Tull, 1991, p.27).

It is thus in this spirit that Carpenter came to study Hinduism. There is more to consider on the issue, however. Carpenter received his inspiration and his encouragement from a number of written sources, both from works of major scholarship and from Unitarian writings. Before considering how Carpenter presented Hinduism in terms of his grand evolutionary scheme it is necessary to reflect on the encounter with those sources and to consider to what extent they influenced his approach to Hinduism.

Carpenter's Sources of Inspiration

Carpenter was familiar with the work of others working in the field of Hindu studies. He depended, sometimes heavily, on the contributions of others to gain the knowledge and the insight from which to draw conclusions on the place of Hinduism in his evolutionary scheme. The sources of his inspiration are varied, however, and it is necessary to reflect on the type of material he found particularly congenial in order fully to appreciate his treatment of Hinduism.

Major Sources

The scholar most depended upon by Carpenter for insight into Hinduism was Max Müller from whose work he had also benefited, though to a lesser extent, for knowledge of Buddhism. It was Max Müller's translations and commentaries of ancient Sanskrit texts that Carpenter relied upon to formulate his own approach to the religion. Carpenter made many references to Max Müller's work in his own writings and cited him as being a crucial figure in the understanding of Hindu religion (1900d, p.26; 1911b, p.42).

It was principally Max Müller's Sacred Books of the East series upon which Carpenter depended. This is made evident by the following examples. In *Early Conceptions of Law in Nature*, Carpenter dealt with the cosmological developments in early Vedic religion. He based his article on a number of key words and concepts as they were presented in Sanskrit. He began the article by explaining the process whereby natural elements were eventually conceived of in human terms. Later in the article he discussed the words used in connection with observation of the sacred Law, namely *dhaman*, *dharman*, *vrata*, and *rita*. A further section contrasted the opposing principles of the *rita* and the *amrita*. In these examples Carpenter made it clear that he was using Max Müller's translation and commentary to explain their meanings and significance (1923, p.714; p.716; p.720). Furthermore, for the students of his who may have wished to study the documents themselves Carpenter recommended the use of Max Müller's commentaries (1900d, p.26; 1911b, p.44). It was thus a Western version of the documents that Carpenter used.

Max Müller's greatest contribution was the publication of the Sacred Books of the East series, a major project lasting 24 years and resulting in 51 volumes. The importance of this enterprise, involving Buddhist and Zoroastrian texts as well as Hindu writings, cannot be exaggerated as the publication of the texts was a major contribution to the understanding of the Hindu tradition. There were other Sanskrit scholars before Max Müller, such as August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845) and William Carey (1761-1834) who produced significant translations of sacred texts. Max Müller's project, however, had a much greater impact. It was more substantial and more influential. Max Müller's work encouraged the West to reflect upon Hinduism in terms of its literature rather than, as hitherto, on the observations of lay people in their meetings with Hindus in the course of their travels. Hinduism had now become, in the minds of scholars, a textual culture in the possession of the West. "This served to give

the study a new popularity, and a new foundation in literature, rather than in common observation as had hitherto been the case" (Sharpe, 1965, p.44).

Max Müller's approach, then, was one that was able to separate the textual background from the philosophy, mythology and practices of contemporary Hinduism. His insistence on a philological approach to the study of religions meant that Hinduism was stripped of all other aspects of its living culture. Thus, its arts, ethnography and archaeology were ignored in favour of "a narrow theory of language" (Kitagawa and Strong, 1985, p.209).

There are parallels in Max Müller's and Carpenter's approaches. As already indicated, Hinduism for Carpenter, as with Max Müller, was a textual phenomenon. In his brief history of Comparative Religion as it affected Hinduism, Carpenter gave a list of stages in Western knowledge of the religion. These stages coincided with the publication of various translations and commentaries of the ancient texts (1911b, pp.40f). Of all the different projects undertaken at the time, it was Max Müller's work that Carpenter offered to his readers as an example of what the Hindu literary heritage included (1911b, p.44). Like Max Müller, Carpenter was able to detach Hindu contemporary practices from the sacred texts that Western scholarship now possessed.

In his greatest work on Hinduism, *Theism in Medieval India*, Carpenter admitted that there was a different culture that had evolved in contemporary India. It was diverse and included apparently contradictory forms of religion. In one direction, Hinduism had developed a "lofty spirituality" whilst in another it accepted "local devotion to gods" (1921b, pp.126-127). The book then continues, however, by a detailed history of the sacred writings and how they were received through the ages. Carpenter made little connection with Hindu practice except in its more radical manifestations (1912b). It is interesting to note that, in *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World*, Carpenter referred to the religions in their commonly accepted titles of "Buddhism",

“Islam” and “Taoism”. With Hinduism, however, as noted earlier, the term “Indian Vedic Literature” was used instead (1911b, p.7).

There are other ways in which Carpenter displayed similarities with Max Müller’s approach. Carpenter was less confident in taking a philological approach to Hinduism because of his limited knowledge of Sanskrit. Nevertheless, Carpenter accepted Max Müller’s arguments based on linguistic connections between the religions. For instance, Müller strove to make linguistic connections between Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. One example of such connections was dealt with by Carpenter in some detail in *Early Conceptions of Law in Nature* (1923). In his book, *Chips from a German Workshop*, Max Müller had made a close identification between the *rita* of Hinduism and the *asha* of Zoroastrianism (1898a, p.83). The concept of *rita* represented the cosmic laws and forces of the universe. According to Carpenter, the Zoroastrian parallel of *asha* was basically the same concept but had developed slightly differently in that it had acquired a more ethical dimension, something referred to by him as the “Righteous Order” (1923, p.720).

In other writings, too, Carpenter claimed a close historical relationship between the sacred texts of the two religions. The two sets of literature shared the same moral outlook, he said, with the same belief in a conflict between the powers of help and hurt. The oppositions of light and dark, as personified by the *deva* and the *asura*, were identified as the same as those of ancient Persia (1913b, p.210).

There are other examples in Carpenter’s work of parallels between Hinduism and Zoroastrianism (1927d, p.169; 1903c, pp.111-112). As his knowledge of Sanskrit was limited, however, he depended on Max Müller for justification of links between the two religions. Thus, the character of Carpenter’s work on Hinduism was less distinctive than may have been the case if it had been Sanskrit that had occupied his attention rather than Pali.

One scholar who had an important part to play in Carpenter's thinking was Auguste Barth (1834-1916), an important exponent of Hinduism in the West in his day. A member of the Asiatic Society of Paris, Barth was well-known for his book, *The Religions of India* (1882). This book was a major review of the state of Indian religion in its early history and in the late Victorian period. It dealt with Buddhism and Jainism as well as with what Barth categorised as the three religions of Vedic origin, Brahmanism and Hinduism. Barth's book involved a study of the ancient texts of Indian religion, and these were compared with later literary works and with the beliefs and practices of later forms of the religion.

Barth's studies led him to posit the notion that the ancient writings were quite distinct from the practice of Hindu religion. They were the property of a sacerdotal caste, a group of initiates and were not the popular poetic works of the masses (1882, p.xiii). There thus developed, said Barth, a "popular religion" that acknowledged the authority of the Vedas but that developed its own metaphysical ideas and ritual practices (1882, p.xv). Barth distinguished between the theology of the Vedas and the theology of this later "popular Hinduism". Vedic theology hovered between polytheism and "a species of monotheism, with several titularies, the central figure of which always changes places with another" (1882, p.29). The theology of "popular Hinduism", said Barth, was based on the "new" divinities of Shiva and Vishnu (1882, p.158).

Barth's contention was that Hinduism as it was now being practiced had failed to engage with its literary inheritance. An example of this was the high moral tone that Barth detected in the Vedas. Though they were concerned, he believed, primarily with ritual observance, they nevertheless bore "an exalted and comprehensive morality" (1882, p.34). Barth felt that this moral tone was absent in current Hindu practice. Thus, the religion was not advancing and, in fact, was experiencing the beginnings of a major decline in the integrity of its tradition. "Hinduism is visibly collapsing and deteriorating" (1882, p.290).

Carpenter was familiar with Barth's work and wrote a substantial review of his book shortly after its publication (Carpenter, 1882c). In a sense, Barth's contribution to Carpenter's thinking can be identified in the way that Carpenter reacted against some of the book's premises. Carpenter felt that Barth had omitted far too much of the history of Hinduism. Barth had focused on, according to Carpenter, the history of Aryan religion and neglected the religion of the rest of the Indian people (Carpenter, 1882c, p.200). Carpenter believed in movement, within Hinduism, towards a higher theism, a form of religion that would develop into something closely approximating monotheism as it was understood in the West. In Carpenter's view, Barth's book, though identifying the seeds of monotheism in the contributions of Kabir and Chaitanya (Barth, 1882, pp.236-239), nonetheless undervalued their influences on Hindu theology (Carpenter, 1882c, p.200).

In some instances, Carpenter accepted Barth's findings. This was the case, for example, with the claims that there were parallels between the religions that showed a historical connection. Thus, in Barth's view, Hinduism had a doctrine of grace and predestination that was similar to that of classical Christianity (1882, p.226). Carpenter seized on this (1903c, p.211) as it fitted in well with his belief that there was a universal religious awareness that manifested itself in all the religions (1882c, p.200). Carpenter believed that in all religions "the same spiritual needs should clamour for fulfilment" (Carpenter, 1882c, p.200).

Carpenter was not untouched by contemporary Hindu scholarship. *Comparative Religion* (1913b) includes the work of numerous researchers and theorists. *A Century of Comparative Religion 1800-1900* includes a detailed section that indicates that Carpenter clearly understood the historical steps taken in the study of Hindu literature (1900d, pp.25-32). He was, however, developing his own approach to the study of Hinduism. As with scholars before him, Carpenter made a distinction between the literature of India and the practice of Hinduism. In Carpenter's case, however, there was no complete separation. For him there was no interest in acknowledging only the

“narrow theory of language” (Kitagawa and Strong, 1985, p.209) that was a criticism of scholars such as Max Müller and Barth, though language was an important element. Carpenter did focus on the literary religious heritage of India but he also expressed interest in how other religious developments took place alongside, sometimes unconnected with, the literary tradition (1921a). Nevertheless, according to Carpenter, Hinduism’s sacred literature was where the essence of Hinduism was to be found.

What Carpenter sought in Hindu literature was to find a connection with religious belief in the present. Carpenter was less dismissive of Hinduism than he thought some scholars, such as Monier-Williams, could be (1925a, p.15). Hinduism, for Carpenter, could not be “false” as it could demonstrate where movements in thought and belief could underline his thesis that evolutionary developments were existent in all religions. Hinduism was a valuable focus for study, said Carpenter, because it could indicate a connection between primal belief and modern thought and thus demonstrate that Hinduism was representative of an early stage of development.

Carpenter approached Hinduism with the basic structure of the ideal religion already present in his mind. In studying Hinduism he was looking for evidence of the origins of those elements of the ideal religion that were yet to be fully manifested but that were most closely associated with his own Unitarian Christianity. Hinduism was therefore approached on his terms, rather than on its own terms. He was looking for evidence to underline his thesis that Unitarianism was the natural resting-place on the road between primal religion and the ideal religion of the future. In other words, Carpenter did not isolate for study the distinctive characteristics of Hinduism, but he did isolate the characteristics within Hinduism that would be recognised as congenial to his Western Christian readership. To do this he depended heavily on those with the linguistic skills that he did not have, such as Max Müller and Monier-Williams. He was not averse, however, to making judgments based on those linguistic points that were drawn from his own understanding of the texts. This underlines the contention, made in

connection with Carpenter and Buddhism in the previous chapter, that Carpenter had his own agenda and his presentation of Hinduism demonstrates this.

Unitarian Sources

Carpenter was first made aware of Indian religion through the family connections with Roy and the founding of the Brahmo Samaj. Carpenter's grandfather, Lant Carpenter, had corresponded with Roy and gave him hospitality in Bristol before Roy's death there shortly after his arrival (Carpenter, R. L., 1848, p.51). Lant Carpenter referred to Roy as if the latter were a fellow Unitarian though from a different culture. He was, he said, "the day-star of Unitarianism" in India (Sargant, 1987, p.11). Roy, however, considered himself a Hindu. He uttered the sacred word *om* before he died and he continued to wear the Brahmin sacred thread (Sargant, 1987, p.23). Roy upheld Advaita Vedanta, but interpreted it in a rationalistic way, identifying knowledge of Brahman with the rational contemplation of God in nature. He denied the efficacy of images and mythological beings and he treated the sacred writings as guides rather than as authorities.

Mary Carpenter, Estlin Carpenter's aunt and the daughter of Lant Carpenter, recorded the meetings that Roy had with her father, and the religious discussions that were held in Roy's lodgings (Carpenter, M., 1875, pp.99-104). It was thus a form of Hinduism that was congenial to the rational Christian that the Carpenter family initially encountered. Though Mary Carpenter travelled to India on four occasions she only met religious leaders who were either members of the Brahmo Samaj or who were radical in their Hinduism. These included Sen, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj at that time, a liberal Brahmin, Sasipada Banerjee, who was to found the Devalaya Institute, and Atmaram Pandurang, founder of another reformed Hindu movement, the Bombay Prarthana Samaj. Mary Carpenter considered these to be loyal Hindus, though she

acknowledged that their form of Hinduism was distinctive of those with a Western education (Sargant, 1987, p.64).

Estlin Carpenter himself became familiar with the theology and practices of radical Hinduism through the contacts made by both Lant and Mary Carpenter. These were assessed and detailed in his reflection on the life of his aunt (1881b). At this time he had written nothing substantial about Hinduism and the understanding he had of the religion was that, beneath its “grotesque” exterior, there was something congenial to the Western monotheist. The two traditions, he said, reflected the same spiritual experience. This was indicated in the book he wrote the year following the biography of his aunt (1882c, p.200). Both Lant Carpenter and Mary Carpenter had had encounters with Hinduism that made little contact with the most practised forms of Hinduism. It is interesting to note that Estlin Carpenter himself, when he began his study of Indian religion, downplayed the significance of classical Hinduism. “The real epoch in Indian religious history began with the foundation of Buddhism” (1883b, p.3).

The influence of Carpenter’s family suggests that his initial understanding of Hinduism was that it was primitive. In its radical forms, however, Carpenter believed it had parallels congenial to the Western theist. Buddhism was, as he wrote in a paper written in 1887, the religion that deserved most attention because of its ethical bases (1903c, p.303). Carpenter went on eventually to study Hinduism more fully but not until he had written a number of articles on Buddhism such as *The Obligations of the New Testament to Buddhism* (1880a). He had now assumed the superiority of Buddhism and his views on Hinduism took longer to form. Consequently, Buddhism was given more sustained treatment than Hinduism as it took some time for his assumptions about the latter to be modified.

Lant and Mary Carpenter, then, both focused their attention on only the radical Westernised forms of Hinduism. Other manifestations of it were not seriously considered. The Brahmo Samaj, with its Western influences, was thought of as a kind of

parallel to British Unitarianism. It had in their minds detached itself from its non-literary heritage and presented the ancient texts for universal ownership. Similarly, Estlin Carpenter was able to view the different manifestations of Hinduism as separate entities. He could speak of Hinduism as a whole as a religion of the “lower culture” (1913b, p.72). The Brahmo Samaj, however, represented a more advanced stage of evolutionary growth, harmonising as it did the ideals of the Protestant West with its rejection of the use of images, together with the ancient teachings of the sacred texts (1912b, p.5). With this in mind, Carpenter was able to identify an internal evolution in Hinduism as he had done in Buddhism. His family inheritance was thus a major factor in the development of his ideas about the treatment of different forms of Hinduism and the status he awarded them.

One early Unitarian to inspire Carpenter was the Orientalist, Sir William Jones (1746-1794). Jones was a Unitarian in the days when the movement was only just becoming formalised. He was a keen adherent, nevertheless, and studied Unitarian thought as expounded by the most influential Unitarians of the day (Holt, 1938, p.90). Jones was a judge in Bengal who took a great interest in Sanskrit literature. He established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 and published *Asiatic Researches*, the first European journal devoted to Oriental studies. He translated a number of ancient texts including *The Ordinances of Menu* (Jones, reprint 2000) and the classical Sanskrit play, *Shakuntala* (Jones, reprint 1901). He was cited by Carpenter as a major voice calling for acknowledgement of the significance of the sacred texts of India (1911b, p.41). Modern scholars have also cited Jones as a major Sanskrit scholar.

We must thank the great scholars of Indology for providing the Western approach to India with a scientific foundation.

Indology started with Sir William Jones in 1786 (Basham, 1975, p.477).

Jones was probably the first Unitarian to encounter the Hindu documents. What was particularly important about Jones' contribution for Carpenter was the presentation of the literary heritage that belonged to India. Carpenter valued Jones' work, not for any insight into Hindu doctrines and practices, but for inspiring the publication of translated ancient texts. Carpenter referred to the collaborators in the publishing projects as "distinguished" (1911b, p.41) and "a band of scholars" (1911b, p.47). This was not only Carpenter's assessment. According to Basham's book, Jones' translations were a matter of some astonishment to the Western world for their depth and understanding (1975, p.473). In *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World*, Carpenter claimed that it was Jones' efforts that resulted in the subsequent surge of interest in translations of the Bhagavad-Gita and other ancient literature, and reflections on them in the journal, *Asiatic Researches* (1911b, p.41). Others have made similar claims about Jones' work. His work has been compared with that of the other great Indologist, Colebrook (Sharpe, 1975, p.21).

Jones had a small but important part to play in the development of Carpenter's approach to Hinduism. Despite living and working within the Hindu culture, Jones had focused on the religion as it was represented by its ancient texts. Carpenter also concentrated his efforts on Hinduism in terms of its sacred writings. The difference between them was that Carpenter extended his range to include later writings too, and he reflected on them and compared them with the writings of other religious traditions. Nonetheless, for Carpenter the religion of Hinduism was explored principally by what its ancient writings contained. In one of the most popular of Carpenter's books, he introduced the section on Hinduism as "India and the Vedic Literature" (1911b, p.7). In a later section he apologised for presenting, owing to a lack of space, only "the earlier and historic forms of Hinduism" (1911b, p.85). Carpenter's understanding of Hinduism began with an approach to its literature and this was an approach he had recognised in Jones' contribution.

An understanding of Carpenter's work would be incomplete without considering the influence upon him of Transcendentalism. In his view, Transcendentalism was responsible for breaking up "the dogmatic fabric of ecclesiastical orthodoxy" (1925a, p.7). Carpenter particularly recognised Emerson as the champion of rationalism who best argued its case with "glowing vision" (1925a, p.7). Emerson went a step further than his Unitarian predecessors did by contemplating a form of Unitarianism that was not characterised uniquely by its Christian, though liberal, heritage. His religion was a mixture of rationalism and mysticism that looked beyond Christianity for inspiration. These ideas were expounded in some detail in a number of essays published as his *Popular Works* (Emerson, 1900).

What was unusual about Emerson was that he introduced a number of Hindu concepts into Unitarianism. At the centre of Emerson's theology was a belief in the supreme significance of the soul, which he considered to be the highest revelation of God. He taught that the human soul was one with God. This idea he drew from the insights of Hinduism, as revealed principally in the teachings of the Upanishads, that the *atman* and Brahman were one. Emerson referred to Brahman with a name of his own creation, the "Over-Soul", this being the link between the *atman* and the *paramatman*, the soul and the divine Soul. Emerson described this concept fully in a major book that went through many reprints (Emerson, reprint 1977).

Emerson's teachings on direct access to the *paramatman* were a tremendous contrast to the traditional rational basis on which much of Unitarian theology was built. His use of Hindu concepts was unusual but, though his ideas were drawn from the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita, they were not treated critically or systematically. Emerson had no interest in academic scholarship and sought simply to benefit personally from the insights he discovered in Indian sacred writings. Emerson was not so much an exponent of Hinduism as a promoter of a personal religion that embraced certain Hindu concepts.

Although Carpenter believed Emerson's approach to be innovative and a valuable means of promoting a rational understanding of Hinduism, he did not follow him in incorporating Hindu concepts into Unitarianism. What he shared with Emerson, however, was his belief that within the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita could be found a more profound religious philosophy than was manifested by contemporary Hindu practice. The Upanishads represented for Carpenter ideas of "higher religion" in that there were discovered therein the seeds for the creation of a form of theism (1920, p.471).

Emerson's claim, that Hindu literature taught that the human soul was one with God, has its parallel in Carpenter's work too. Carpenter claimed that the Bhagavad-Gita included the concept of what he called "mutual inherence". By the means of Vishnu's incarnation as Krishna, a close association between him and the individual was made possible. Individuals dwelt in Vishnu and Vishnu dwelt in them. There was a "likeness of nature with him" that brought Vishnu and the individual into one entity (1909b, p.244). It was what he believed to be a divine communion (1925a, p.15).

Emerson was a pioneer, though far more radical in his Unitarianism than even Carpenter was. Carpenter never rejected his commitment to the person of Christ and the essential superiority of Christianity. Emerson, though, found a sublime philosophical manifestation of Hinduism within its sacred texts. This is what Carpenter also discovered and it was to those texts that Carpenter looked to find what he considered the genuine Hinduism that had been overshadowed by centuries of mythological creativity.

The Evolutionary Status of Hinduism

Carpenter's understanding of Hinduism was that, as a whole, it represented a much earlier stage of evolution than did Buddhism or Christianity. As the evolutionary principles applied to all religions, however, he also believed that there was movement within Hinduism. As with other religions, Carpenter believed that God was constantly

drawing humanity forward towards fuller self-realisation and that this could be identified within Hinduism. In assessing Hinduism in its contemporary state, however, Carpenter made use of his seven criteria for advanced religion, the criteria first detailed in Chapter 3.

1. *The Centrality of Ethics*

As indicated in Chapter 3, for Carpenter, ethics was a major means of determining how far a religion had progressed along the evolutionary path towards being regarded as an “advanced” religion. His assessment of Hinduism was that it had a poor record with regard to ethics, primarily because of the dominance of the doctrine of *karma*.

Carpenter believed that Hinduism had suffered a retrogression in that it had begun with a concern for ethics, as indeed had all religions (1906a, p.504). He believed that *karma* was a replacement for the fundamental ethical stance that Hinduism had displayed in its earliest manifestation and in its ancient sacred writings. He argued that much had been changed in the history of Hinduism that had led to a downgrading in the importance of the ethical demand so as to bolster the teaching of *karma* (1903c, p.109). He suggested that Vedic philosophy stressed the importance of conduct but that this had been lost by the introduction of the notion of *karma* by an outside race of people, the Aryans (1903c, p.110). According to Carpenter, from that point onwards *karma* became firmly established as the most essential and most important doctrine of Hinduism, at the expense of a concern for ethics.

Carpenter did acknowledge coherence within the doctrine of *karma*. He accepted that it was a justifiable philosophical idea that explained the facts of human history. Its difficulty for Carpenter, however, was that it did not seem to lead to an improvement in ethical awareness. It was always a process that was never complete. There was no end product, there was no acknowledgement of human progress working

through its moral responsibilities and aiming for ultimate perfection. "The administration of the world is moral, but this did not require the ultimate triumph of the good" (1903c, p.111). As an evolutionist Carpenter believed in process. He was, however, an evolutionist who believed in an ultimate finality. There was for him an end towards which humanity was being drawn. That end involved the fullest realisation of human ethical possibilities. A process without a goal, where ethics did not feature, was thus for him quite meaningless.

Carpenter argued that the issue of ethics was not central to Hinduism because he believed that *karma* was a cold, mechanical process. It envisaged the Absolute, not as a loving father, but as an indifferent force, powerless to intervene in human destiny. Becoming aware of the Ultimate, he said, was by means of reflection not by practice of the moral life. The Absolute, he said, was uninterested in human strife and was not in a position to give comfort (1911b, p.91). To become one with the Universal Self meant, instead of working ethically in the world, withdrawing from others and sinking "into the deeps of being" (1911b, p.91). Carpenter was firm in his belief that *karma* had destroyed Hinduism's ability to teach the centrality of ethics. Its "corrosive" effect led, he believed, to the "decay" of ethical values in Indian life.

It enters the family and breaks up the joint household; it destroys the sense of responsibility in kinship; and poor relations are thrust out into helplessness and want. Into the community it introduces the spirit of self-aggrandizement and discord (1912b, p.6).

What is surprising about Carpenter is that he did not recognise the contradictions in his own writings. In *Theism in Medieval India* he dealt in some detail with the doctrine of *dharma*. He explained how it could be interpreted in terms of duty and morality. It meant, he said, that followers should treat their fellows with goodwill. Beneath all, he said, "was an inclusive morality" (1921b, p.164).

Carpenter was aware of the ethical element of Hinduism but believed that its effectiveness was lost in the complexity of the philosophical teachings that allowed *karma* to become the most dominant guide. Hinduism had an ethical dimension, said Carpenter, but it lacked the force to make it sufficiently powerful to move individuals (1883a, I, p.20).

The more that Hinduism lost touch with its dependence on *karma*, Carpenter believed, the more it had the ability to progress in ethical terms. Thus, the reformers of the mediaeval period (1921b, pp.448f), and the later creation of the Brahmo Samaj (1912b, pp.2f), were examples of how Hinduism could return to its ethical tradition.

2. Social Progress

For Carpenter, ethics was more than concern for personal standards but embraced a concern for society as a whole. Social progress was thus a major feature of an advanced religion in Carpenter's system (1910c, p.4; 1912b, p.7; 1916a, p.78). Concerning Hinduism as a whole, Carpenter felt that it had little concern for social conditions. The reason for this, in Carpenter's view, was the dominance of the doctrine of *karma*. He claimed that *karma* produced only resignation in the face of social despair. The doctrine of *karma*, he said, "can beget no love" (1911b, p.87). He further claimed that, because of *karma*, Hinduism had never allied itself with social progress until the advent of reform movements of modern times, such as that of the Brahmo Samaj. In fact, he said that Hinduism had no concept of social progress or of a purpose for society where communal evil could be worked out. Furthermore, there was, he said, no vision of a gathering together of people into one fellowship of peace where differences of race and class could be resolved (1911b, p.88).

The fundamental issue for Carpenter was that *karma* taught a disconnection between human behaviour and social progress as all acts were part of the individual's determination of his or her personal destiny. There was no social amendment for its own

sake. "The Absolute has no interest in our strife" (1911b, p.91). The result of such an attitude meant that, in Carpenter's view, the Hindu had no interest in the plight of others in the community. The strictures of *karma* meant resignation before the "ravages" of disease, the large number of deaths in India was thus "hideous", and one witnessed in the imagination a "dismal" procession of "desolated" families enduring "enfeebled" lives (1912b, p.8).

Carpenter argued that it was only by overriding the effects of *karma*, as he believed was achieved by the devotional practices of the *bhakti* poets, that Indians could feel a sense of urgency to work for the improvement of social conditions. Buddhism also had a doctrine of *karma*, said Carpenter, but it was not so oppressive. It acknowledged the non-karmic forces at play and the indeterminacy of the universe. Thus, early Buddhism did have a social conscience (1883, III, p.20). The Hindu reformers who softened the impact of *karma* and made it less of an impersonal force operating beyond divine control also impressed Carpenter. He referred to Ramanuja, for example, as teaching a doctrine of grace that was capable of transcending *karma* (1917, pp.384-385; 1921b, p.157).

According to Carpenter, *karma* was something that ruled in the material world and could therefore in no way be connected to social morality. It was connected with matter and was lodged in the bodily environment. It was unable to distinguish between social righteousness and unrighteousness. Only an omniscient Mind could ordain the principles of morality (1920, p.480). As *karma* was an impersonal "coadjutor" (1920, p.482), there was no way, for Carpenter, that the need for social righteousness could be instilled in the minds and hearts of people.

3. *The Abandonment of Mythology*

Connected with the issue of social progress was the abandonment of mythology. Mythology was, for Carpenter, a stumbling block to the development of healthy social

ethics. Carpenter believed that it was crucial for an evolutionary advanced religion to abandon unnecessary mythology and ritual. In his view, myths in themselves would not be problematic if they were interpreted as metaphors. For Carpenter, stories imbued with moral teaching were representative of a type of religion that had a rational basis, that had confidence in itself and had a firm intellectual basis (1913b, p.175). With Hinduism, however, Carpenter had difficulty in believing that its mythology was anything but a stumbling block to evolutionary development. With Hindu mythology Carpenter linked its elaborate ritual, as he believed that the two were firmly bound together. It was the complex mythology that contained the antique secrets of the meaning of religious performance (1913b, p.175). Carpenter believed that Hindu ritual was understood as a parallel on earth of what existed in the heavens. There were thus analogies between ritual and the cosmic orders (1923, p.718).

There are several ways in which Carpenter found Hinduism to be a “lowly” religion in terms of its mythology. Firstly, Hindu mythology failed to enable the devotee to recognise what was real. It did not encourage a reflection on the totality of natural experience. In order to come to terms with existence it was essential, said Carpenter, to recognise the uniform in nature. Advanced religions focused on the recurrent rather than on the exceptional in order to discover some kind of harmony. Hinduism, on the other hand, saw nature as just a diverse collection of unrelated powers (1917, p.375) and it made no connections between them. Its mythology encouraged the devotee to celebrate the miraculous and the incredible and thus avoid what was the genuine state of reality. Only in the mediaeval period did Hindu thinkers begin to reflect on the real state of the world. The Vedic poets were thus “on the way” to a more advanced religion (1923, p.715).

A second difficulty Carpenter had with Hindu mythology was that any deity became an abstraction. Carpenter did acknowledge that religious ideas in Hinduism were in constant change. There was insufficient change, however, as regards ideas of divinity.

He claimed that, in its earliest forms, Hinduism was an amorphous collection of ideas about divinity with no central concept to bind the religion together. Nature gods were worshipped but there was no connection between them and no agreement on their identity or role. Carpenter acknowledged that these ideas gave way to the *trimurti* but that such concepts were inadequate in that the persons of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva were formless. There was no clear understanding of their true nature and Hindus had to rely upon their own inner resources for the grounds of their belief (1917, p.376). Mythology was therefore incapable, in Carpenter's view, of producing belief in an approachable, conceivable deity.

A third reason why Carpenter found Hindu mythology to be problematic is that he believed it fostered a religion of helplessness. His fiercest condemnation of Hindu mythology is to be found in the address he gave to the eighty-second anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj in 1912. Unhesitatingly referring to Hindu mythology as consisting in "ancient idolatries", Carpenter castigated Hinduism for failing to move the hearts of its followers (1912b, p.6). This is why he had a high opinion of the work of the Tamil poets. Although they had not yet achieved an advanced religious status they nevertheless made a major step forward. Their form of Hinduism sought to move the hearts of their followers by opposing the use of images in worship and abandoning unnecessary ritual (1917, p.388). Hinduism's difficulty in reforming itself was due, said Carpenter, to the constraining effect of an outdated mythology that disconnected believers from their environment. The result, he felt, was a sense of uselessness and an indifference to the suffering and poverty of fellow Indians (1912b, p.7).

A fourth reason for Carpenter to castigate Hinduism for its mythology was that he felt it led to a privatised form of religion. The complex mythology led to an elaborate cultus focused on the Brahmin caste and dependent upon it. The use of myths, images and ancient rituals only served to separate people. Hinduism involved individuals often worshipping alone and relying upon a complex belief system that was not open to all.

Advanced religion, in Carpenter's view, was a communal phenomenon that encouraged the individual to be a genuine partaker of the experience (1914b, p.2). This is what he believed was being explored by the Tamil poets, the Alvars. They were part of the mediaeval *bhakti* reform tradition that was opposed to the Brahmin cultus, was opposed to the use of Sanskrit and expressed itself in the vernacular. Kabir, Chaitanya and others opened up worship and practice to all and were therefore hospitable to all (1921b, p.368). In Carpenter's understanding of the tradition, it also discarded the mechanicalism of Hinduism and opened the way for the operation of grace (1921b, p.448).

Carpenter was to see movement here and to identify a coherent structure in Hinduism. The followers of the Alvars, like all *bhakti* followers, might still participate in Brahmin rituals. There was, and always has been, much syncretism and Hindu mythology was still part of the religion of many reformed Hindus. In Carpenter's view, therefore, Hinduism had failed to satisfy the criterion of abandoning mythology. This placed it clearly in the category of a primal expression of religion with regard to evolutionary development. There were internal developments in Hinduism, however, and certain Hindu reformers demonstrated that internal evolution had taken place. These developments will be considered later.

4. *The Conquering of Ignorance*

For Carpenter, the abandonment of mythology was possible only with the conquering of ignorance. Carpenter believed that Hinduism, in its classical form, failed this test to determine whether it deserved to be granted an advanced evolutionary status. Carpenter did not claim that Hinduism failed to teach the need to overcome ignorance. On the contrary, whilst commenting on the work of the reformer Ramanuja, Carpenter claimed that, in Hinduism, ignorance was acknowledged as a stumbling block to spiritual progress. "An unbeginning Ignorance would be of no use to Brahma" (1921b,

p.392). The issue for Carpenter, however, was whether the need for a conquering of ignorance was to be applied to everyone. In order for a religion to qualify for advanced status Carpenter felt that the conquering of ignorance should be the goal for all people. The conquering of ignorance and the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom was felt to be a central tenet of an advanced religion. This “spiritual education” had to be complete for all (1903c, p.144). He believed that Hinduism, in its earliest forms, had failed to achieve this.

Carpenter’s understanding of Hinduism was that it taught an elitist theology. It offered a path of awareness to a select number of individuals who could attain wisdom and insight whilst others were left without spiritual encouragement. The fortunate minority had access to what Carpenter called “the vision of reality” whilst all others would remain in ignorance (1906c, p.25). Even in reformed forms of Hinduism there was a two-tier system that encouraged Carpenter to think of the religion in terms of election. The students of the Vedas, and those with knowledge of Sanskrit, referred to by Carpenter as “the elect”, were able to find enlightenment. They did not come upon enlightenment by chance but escaped from ignorance by a divine act of will. Carpenter said, “to remove oneself from ignorance is not self-wrought, but the act of the Universal Self” (1917, p.385).

Carpenter also commented upon the actual nature of knowledge and what the conquering of ignorance implied. Acknowledging that there was movement within Hinduism and that the process of internal evolution meant progress, Carpenter identified a change in the way that ignorance was dealt with, as Hindu teachers understood it. Initially, the conquering of ignorance was accomplished simply by the use of intellectual processes. By applying the mind to spiritual matters the devotee would be able to cast off the state of ignorance and become aware of “the Ultimate” (1911b, p.90). Thus, enlightenment was available to those with the intellectual tools and capacity to achieve it. Later Hindu teachers, however, rejected the intellectual nature of enlightenment.

Instead, the conquering of ignorance was concerned with intuition. Carpenter referred, for example, to the Saivite Siddhânta system where intuitive wisdom was taught as one of eight “attributes” or essential principles (1920, p.481).

There was, then, in Carpenter’s understanding of Hinduism, a positive development in the way that the conquering of ignorance was dealt with. This enabled later manifestations of Hinduism to be included as advanced forms of religion. Whilst earlier forms of Hinduism, in Carpenter’s view, rejected the findings of modern science (1911b, p.92), the Brahmo Samaj, for example, welcomed it (1912b, p.6). In the latter form, therefore, Hindu belief and practice could be envisaged as being at an advanced stage of evolutionary development. As long as the conquering of ignorance was held as a concern for the few, however, then Carpenter could not embrace it as a genuine expression of advanced religion.

5. Universal Personal Salvation

Carpenter felt that evolutionary science taught that there was a continuing process, following death, of growth and development. There had to be constant movement towards a goal, as yet unseen, when humanity would reach perfection and would enjoy God’s complete revelation. Thus, an advanced religion was one, he believed, that would recognise this purposeful human advance.

With regard to Hinduism, Carpenter felt that it failed to satisfy the important criterion of universal personal salvation. The purpose of a universal afterlife, he believed, was to work through the consequences of evil. For a religion to be of equal value with Christianity there had to be a belief that evil would be dealt with, that there would be a final solution to the inherent problem of imperfection and injustice.

Carpenter had a problem with Hinduism because he believed that it had no concept of an end-time or of a sense of purpose. In his opinion the series of lives connected with *karma* did not lead to anything in particular (1913b, pp.243-249). What Hinduism taught

about the end-time, he felt, was that it was never reached. Carpenter interpreted this as meaning that, as far as the mind could cope with such ultimacy, there could be no real conception of an eventual total end-time. Thus there could never be, said Carpenter, a triumph of good over evil (1903c, p.111).

In *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World* Carpenter stressed that if Hinduism had no idea of progress or purpose where evil can be worked out then the Absolute is totally indifferent to the human condition and destiny. Such a religion is then incapable of giving meaning to a person's life and has no answers to the existential crises of life (1911b, p.92). The gods of the *trimurti*, said Carpenter, would be remote from the individual and would be failures as regards being able to provide for ultimate human needs (1903c, p.144). A further problem for Carpenter was what Carpenter believed was a loss of individuality as, after death, there was an ultimate merger of the individual self with the universal Self where there was a loss of distinction "between subject and object" (1902a, p.33).

Carpenter believed that Hinduism's teachings on life after death had consequences for the fact of death itself. He claimed that Hinduism taught that physical death was of no importance, that the vast number of deaths in India at that time was merely the penalising of lots of people for evil committed in earlier lives (1912b, p.7). Christians cared about physical death, he said, because they looked upon life as a trust. Life was the beginning of humanity's spiritual education as God's children and making life a fitting scene for training was a prime duty. This meant promoting public welfare and striving to save life so as to be of maximum service. "The maintenance of life is thus inwrought into the very texture of our religion" (1912b, p.7).

6. *Monotheism*

Carpenter believed that Hinduism had decayed with the attempts to give some recognisable form to God in the image of Vishnu (1911b, p.52). The origins of

Hinduism, he believed, lay in the Vedas with their philosophical speculation on the nature of the Absolute. This early form of the religion was free, he said, of the worship of images. The religion degenerated, he said, with the attempt to concretise the image of the Absolute (1913b, pp.59-60).

Carpenter's view of degeneration was held in tension with the idea that Hinduism was on a constant move towards a completed monotheism. Only two years after the publication of his reference to Hindu decay, Carpenter wrote about the development of Hindu theology that had witnessed an advance from belief in Vishnu as the Vedic deity of the sun to association with Shiva and Brahma. This was, he said, a move towards monotheism, a move that was further developed when "the unity of the moral order was combined with the unity of creative might" (1913b, pp.128-131).

Though Carpenter never declared that Hinduism was unambiguously a monotheistic religion, he did identify, in line with his evolutionary approach, traditions within Hinduism that would enable it to evolve towards a monotheistic position. He believed that there was constant movement. Although he felt that Hinduism itself represented an early stage of evolution, within the history of Hinduism a similar evolution of ideas could be determined. This was the case with the gradual developments in mediaeval Indian philosophy that appeared to be closer to Western concepts of monotheism. He highlighted the work, for example, of Tulsi Das, whom he believed had preached a basic doctrine that there was only one God (1921b, p.510). Although Carpenter did not give detailed accounts of the theologies of Namdev and Kabir, he stressed the association between their own deity and Allah, indicating the possibility that these two Hindu teachers taught an early form of monotheism (1921b, pp.455-459).

Carpenter believed that, within Hinduism, a progression of ideas from the earliest of phases to a more developed theology was identifiable. From the history of ideas in India he pulled out a number of developments that he claimed displayed

evolutionary growth. For example, he showed how the primal thinkers interpreted the energies of the world in human-like terms. A complex and detailed cosmology comprised a number of deities having sovereignty over the different spheres of life. The first significant development, in Carpenter's view, came with the recognition by the Vedic poets of the regularity and uniformity of the energies of nature (1923, p.715). It was this "development" that moved Indian religion on from one stage of the evolutionary path into the next.

The next step towards monotheism, in Carpenter's view, came with the work of the Tamil poets of the seventh century, the Alvars. A product of the *bhakti* type of devotional Hinduism, this movement included poets of all castes, even of the humblest, who drew all kinds of people to them, including women. Opposed to the use of images in worship, the Tamil poets rejected the complex form of ritual integral to traditional Hinduism and favoured instead what Carpenter called "pure, spiritual worship" (1917, p.388).

A major change came about, said Carpenter, when Shiva was acknowledged no longer as a god resulting from the experiences of dread in lonely places amid the violent aspects of nature nor as a non-Aryan god to whose worship the Brahmins were opposed. Gradually Shiva was accepted as the only god to be offered worship and the Saivites were scornful of other gods, which they considered artificial. Shiva was identified as the ideal divinity. According to Carpenter, Shiva was not only accepted as a type of supreme deity, but was later identified with Brahman, the Absolute (1920, pp.470-471). From this point on, Shiva became the object of devout aspiration and the first stirrings took place of a yearning for the recognition of one God and the acceptance of the whole of humanity as one people (1920, p.485).

That Carpenter felt that Hinduism contained within it some form of monotheism is apparent by the way he identified within the religion a notion akin to that of the Logos. The Hindu version of the Logos, in Carpenter's view, was the concept of the

avatar, a divine incarnation undertaken for the purpose of assisting the world in distress or to help humankind to find liberation. In his “Aspects of Theism in Hinduism and Judaism: a Parallel and a Contrast” (1917), Carpenter recognised an analogy between Philo’s Logos Theology and Vedantin philosophy. He asserted that the belief in Brahman, the ground of existence within separate selves, was a parallel to Philo’s Logos theology. Philo (c.25BCE-50CE) interpreted the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures in terms of Greek Philosophy, depicting the Logos as the intelligible element in God’s mysterious being, the means of the divine revelation, and the source of its rational order. Carpenter considered Philo’s Logos theology as a marriage between Jewish Law and Greek Philosophy (1917, p.378). The idea of the Logos was justified, thought Carpenter, if it pointed to a greater reality than itself. It was not justified if it acted merely as a mediator.

Carpenter, then, did have a distinctive way of characterising Hinduism in that, for him, it had been wholeheartedly a monotheistic religion that had lost its monotheistic focus when it adopted *karma*. Carpenter believed that there was a continual presence of monotheism within Hinduism. This was evidence of the evolutionary progress made by humanity that saw its further development in “theistic Buddhism” and Christianity. It was an idiosyncratic approach but it served a useful purpose in holding together both a belief in evolution and the belief in the deterioration of Hinduism.

7. The Criterion of Joy

As the reality of the one God was the justification for human joy, Carpenter felt that Hinduism was a joyless religion. This was another indication to Carpenter that Hinduism was not an advanced religion in his evolutionary scheme. In this regard, as with Buddhism, Carpenter was in step with other Victorian commentators. Hinduism was felt by some scholars to be a pessimistic religion that had no comfort to offer humanity. Barth, for example, claimed that Hinduism had a “melancholy” view of life

that "heard the wail of a people unhappy and tired of life" (1882, p. 83). Alfred Lyall (1835-1911) said that Hinduism had no consolation to give to humanity and that it engendered among its followers a pessimistic outlook (1908, p.125).

Carpenter's own judgment was that the philosophical speculations of Hinduism were responsible for the creation of a faith of resignation and pessimism. In particular he felt that the doctrine of *karma* offered no comfort to humanity and it therefore stifled joy (1911b, p.87). The doctrine of *karma*, he said, took God away from any role to improve human conditions. God was envisaged as distant, remote and unconcerned with the human situation (1911b, p.91). Such a philosophy led, believed Carpenter, to a position where human beings themselves felt incapable of changing anything. It prevented people from working to improve social conditions and to making the world a happier place in which to live. There was thus, he said, "no inner joy and strength" (1912b, p.6).

Carpenter's understanding of Hinduism was that it encouraged the belief that the world was no place for the discovery of comfort and satisfaction. The future held for humanity only "everlasting negation" (1903c, p.211). The only way to find some kind of comfort was to escape from it. Hinduism was concerned primarily, he asserted, with retreating from the world (1921b, p.164). In the world there was no meaning and a blind faith in the acceptance of all that one had to experience. In *Worship*, he claimed that the Indian mind could contemplate the situation whereby God could kill an innocent child and strip people of all their wealth and possessions for no apparent reason. They would, however, accept the situation without question and continue to love God. Carpenter compared this with the teachings of St. Paul where only good came to those who loved God (1914b, p.2).

As Carpenter felt that it was *karma* that encouraged Hinduism to be pessimistic, he believed that it was possible for change to take place within the religion whereby the extremes of karmic philosophy would be tempered by God's grace. He thus celebrated the contribution of Chaitanya for reclaiming the real world as a place for the enjoyment

of God's relationship with humankind. In Chaitanya's form of Hinduism, said Carpenter, there was potential for the experience of joy where it could be seen that "the whole scene of human existence was bathed in God's love" (1921a, p.676). There was potential, then, for aspects of Hinduism to show joyful tendencies, although Carpenter's case was that Hinduism was still essentially pessimistic.

In Carpenter's system, then, Hinduism failed to satisfy the criterion of joy and this counted against its being considered an advanced religion in Carpenter's evolutionary scheme. He felt that Hinduism was an unfortunate contrast to Christianity. Hinduism, he said, preached that all was transitory, that there was no permanent personal relationship with God and that there was every reason to be pessimistic. Christianity, on the other hand, was able to engage with the world and find meaning in human activity. Only with Christianity, in whatever form, was it possible to be fully at ease with the facts of existence (1903c, p.267).

Internal Evolution

One means that Carpenter employed to give Hinduism a significant role in religious evolutionary development was to give some structure to its diversity. He was able to represent Hinduism's different traditions as internal evolutionary stages. He wrote about the current schools within Hinduism in a language that suggested that they existed only in the past. Carpenter's inference was that they had been completed, that they followed on from something else and that they were leading on towards something more advanced.

Carpenter showed how one Hindu tradition had an influence upon another as if there had been a coherent movement from one tradition to another. The doctrine of *karma*, as understood in the Mahabharata, was believed to lead on to something else (1921b, p.165) and, with the composition of the Upanishads, came a change in the perception of Brahman (1921b, p.185). Shiva then *became* the Supreme Deity and

assimilated with Brahman (1921b, p.227). The elements of Vaishnavism were also referred to in the past tense as if later manifestations of Hinduism had supplanted them (1921b, p.448). What Carpenter was trying to indicate was that there were clear stages in the development of Indian monotheism that would take Hinduism closer to the future ideal religion. What was lost in the process was an affirmation that Hinduism was still practised in its primal form by more devotees than were attached to later movements. Carpenter's agenda, however, was not to demonstrate Hinduism as it was practised in his day. His aim was to demonstrate a coherent progression of ideas beginning with a basic nature religion to a more clearly identifiable monotheism. By so doing Carpenter was able to offer Hinduism as a significant vehicle of human evolution and growth.

What Carpenter's presentation of Hinduism also did was to suggest that there were elements that could be paralleled with Christian teachings. If Hinduism was moving forwards then there had to be identifiable elements within the religion that were similar to those aspects of Christianity exemplifying it as a religion of advanced status. Carpenter aimed to avoid a "provincialism in religion" (1906c, p.26) by elevating ideas that were common to both Hinduism and Christianity.

Carpenter was wary, however, of drawing the wrong conclusions about apparent similarities. For example, he warned against those writers who claimed a much closer connection between the Hindu and Christian traditions. He was harshly critical, for example, of Washburn Hopkins (1857-1932) who had suggested, in his book *India, Old and New* (Hopkins, 1901), that similarities between the Upanishads and the Fourth Gospel were due to a borrowing of one from the other. Carpenter acknowledged similar thought, feeling and expression in the two documents, but claimed that they were just vague similarities. Many of the alleged resemblances, he said, lay in different planes of thought (1921b, p.264). For Carpenter, there had to be indicators that Hindus were beginning to experience in their tradition the same yearnings for awareness of God as

Christians had experienced in theirs. Carpenter highlighted any suggestion that the same kind of evolutionary stages were in process as evidence for his thesis.

For Carpenter, those versions of Hinduism that paralleled the virtues he placed the highest in Christianity were considered to be manifestations of evolutionary developments taking place. He thus celebrated the work of Ramanuja, for example, and the creation of the Brahmo Samaj. Ramanuja's contribution was highlighted because Carpenter felt that his theology was almost monotheistic. According to Carpenter, Ramanuja promoted the worship of one God as infinite Creator (1911d, p.203). Though it was not quite the same as Christian monotheism as it focused on Vishnu, nonetheless it was an advance on what Carpenter felt was an incoherent and complex theological system that he once referred to as "grotesque" (1882c, p.200). Carpenter felt that Ramanuja had rejected pantheistic idealism for belief in a more personalised deity. Vishnu was to be worshipped, not as an impersonal abstraction or unknowable Absolute, but as the ultimate Personality (1917, p.382). Carpenter acknowledged that Ramanuja's teachings did not overtly affirm monotheism, but he felt that they did expound an ultimate Unity beyond a plurality (1917, p.383). Carpenter praised Ramanuja because of the latter's belief in divine immanence and his acknowledgment of the reality of the world (1921b, pp.396-397). Also, as already noted, Carpenter favoured Ramanuja's position because of its stress on the operation of grace that dented the cold indifference of the doctrine of *karma* (1921b, p.413).

Carpenter presented grace in later developments of Hinduism as being something analogous to the Christian doctrine of grace. He portrayed the Tamil Saivites of the ninth century as being exponents of a doctrine of grace. Manikka Vacagar was said to be released from the bondage of ignorance owing to the operation of "divine grace" or *prasada*. He was lifted up by the arm of God into "mystic union" (1920, pp.475-476). Carpenter claimed that it was not only Saivite Hinduism that stressed the

significance of grace as, in the Northern Vaishnavite tradition, it was one of the basic elements of Hindu devotion (1921b, p.448).

Carpenter believed that the universal religion of the future would be one where doctrinal differences would be eschewed and all could come together united in furtherance of basic ethical values. It was for this reason that he cited the reform movements of Hinduism as later stages of an internal evolution. He believed that universalism was taught by Ramanuja, Ramananda, Kabir, Chaitanya and Tulsi Das. These, he believed, articulated most clearly a religious system less encumbered with cultural restrictions and more willing to embrace perceptions of the truth from alien sources. Kabir, for example, minimised the differences, said Carpenter, particularly between Hinduism and Islam (1921b, p.459).

A further evolutionary step was taken within Hinduism, Carpenter believed, with the advent of the Brahmo Samaj. Carpenter believed that the Brahmo Samaj was an integral though reformed member of the Hindu tradition. He did not claim it as a new form of Hinduism that had rejected its inheritance but one that looked back to its early roots. "The Brahmo Samaj is connected with people from the dawn of history", he said (1912b, p.2).

Carpenter looked upon the Brahmo Samaj as re-creating the basic ideals of Hinduism that he felt had been perverted over time by a growing dependence upon the use of religious images. "The Brahmo Samaj preserves the worship of God in spirit and in truth" (1912b, p.3). Carpenter felt that Hinduism had degenerated over time and that the Brahmo Samaj had returned to its basic ideals. On the other hand, the Brahmo Samaj was rated highly by Carpenter because of its rejection of images and its links with Western civilisation (1912b, p.5). It was a form of Hinduism that shared the ideals that he valued.

For Carpenter, the Brahmo Samaj displayed how Hinduism had evolved and replaced its outworn principles with the advanced ideas of the West. It was at an

advanced stage in Hindu terms, quite simply because it was closer to the Unitarian Christianity that Carpenter upheld. Other forms of Hinduism were representative of that earlier form of religion that was being drawn forwards towards greater truth and understanding. All religious traditions were subject to the law of evolution and thus, even in Hinduism, advances could be acknowledged.

An Appraisal

Carpenter's criteria for judging whether Hinduism could be regarded as an advanced religion in his evolutionary scheme have been given detailed treatment. In his view, Hinduism was at an early stage in evolutionary development. It is now necessary to consider the consequences of trying to place Hinduism into his evolutionary scheme. Though Carpenter acknowledged that Hinduism was not a coherent tradition with just one set of doctrines, but a diverse culture with many different and often contradictory teachings (1921b, p.124), he nevertheless believed that there was a steady evolutionary process taking place. Hinduism, with its wide variations of belief and practice, thus had an integral role to play in his evolutionary scheme.

Carpenter was quick to suggest that later manifestations of Hinduism were indications of evolutionary developments. What is surprising, therefore, is that he omitted discussion on a number of modern developments within Hinduism that would more easily have supported his thesis. He seemed to have no interest, for example, in the formation, in 1875, of the Arya Samaj by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), a reform movement that sought to modernise Hinduism but without reference to European influences. Nor did Carpenter show any interest in the work of Ramakrishna (1834-1886), Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) or Vivekananda (1863-1902). This attitude was a contrast to the enthusiasm he showed for the Brahmo Samaj, a movement he believed to be capable of achieving making a great contribution to Indian religious life (1912b, pp.7-8).

There is a possible reason why Carpenter did not comment on the modern Hindu reform movements. Unlike the Brahmo Samaj, the reform movements mentioned did not display any movement theologically towards liberal Christianity. If evolutionary advances led to a position most clearly represented by Unitarian Christianity then it would be difficult to fit some modern Hindu reform movements into Carpenter's scheme.

Carpenter's attitude towards Hinduism, particularly with regard to universal personal salvation, reflects his inability fully to appreciate Hindu philosophy. His belief that there was no end-time in Hindu teachings is not quite correct. There are, within the Hindus system of belief, a number of ages in each of which there will be an end. Ultimately, there will be an end of all the ages though this would not be for millions of years to come. Carpenter's belief that Hinduism fails because of its teaching of a loss of individuality also displays something of his lack of appreciation of the complexity of Hindu philosophy. Hinduism teaches that there is no differentiation between Brahman and *atman*, nor between the individual and God. The apparent separateness between the human being and God is due to *maya*. Reclamation of the individual's divinity is possible only when one can fully experience the unreality of the world. The *advaita* position of Sankara would conceive of *moksha* as being the realisation of oneness with the ultimate, not so much as an absorption of the soul into Brahman but the acceptance that there has never been any distinction from the Ultimate. Nonetheless, it was not unusual for Western scholars to interpret Hindu teachings as rather negative, finding the complete absorption into the One, or extinction, as being analogous to an unjustifiable death (Barth, 1882, p.79).

Carpenter also did not fully appreciate the differences towards the individual as taught by the different cultures of East and West. For Carpenter, the status of the individual was important. This reflected something of the Western culture of stressing the nature of the individual that could be traced back to the influence of Greek

philosophy, reinforced by Protestant theology. The apparent devaluation of the personality in Hinduism, however, may well be linked to the relative subordination of the individual to the family, the caste or some other grouping in the Hindu social system. Whatever the philosophical background to Hindu teleology, Carpenter felt that it was insufficient in that it could not fit with his evolutionary stance. For Carpenter, universal personal salvation, as understood in Unitarian Christian terms, was an absolute requirement for advanced status as a religious system.

Carpenter tended to portray Hinduism as basically a monotheistic religion that had decayed and lost sight of its original foundations. He sought to emphasise the fact that there is within Hinduism an extensive and persistent body of monotheistic thought. The consequence of his approach, however, was that the Hindu tradition appeared not to contain a manifestation of the kind of monotheism exemplified by Judaism and Christianity. Carpenter was attempting to describe Hindu theism by Western definitions and this tended to overlook the distinctive Hindu approach that recognised the one God amongst the complexity of deities. Even those movements within Hinduism that have been most influenced by Western thought, praised by Carpenter for their monotheistic outlook, have remained firmly monistic in their approach. The Brahmo Samaj of India, for example, has always sought to retain a distinctive Hindu identity, with a type of theism unlike that of Christianity. A leading member of the Brahmo Samaj of India in Carpenter's day made this evident in a speech to the 1906 Benares Theistic Conference.

The faith of the Theistic Church is not the Theism of ancient Judaism, or Mohammedanism, or current orthodox Christianity. The Parama Purusha, or Supreme Being, whom we worship, is not that anthropomorphic and extracosmic being, familiar to those forms of faith, who has his seat in a place called heaven and rules the world therefrom. He is immanent in matter and mind. His is a besetting

Presence, within and without, behind and before (Sastri, 1907a, p.261).

Carpenter's presentation of the work of some of the later Hindu teachers also demonstrated his insistence upon identifying Hinduism as monotheistic. The positions of Namdev, Kabir and Tulsi Das (1921b, pp.453, 459, 510) are not as clear as Carpenter wanted his readers to believe. That these teachers were monotheists is unclear owing to the fact that their systems of belief were very complex. The *bhaktas* came the closest to manifesting a form of monotheism in that they elevated a chosen deity, largely because such a practice suited their poetic forms. Tulsi Das, for example, distinguished Rama from Vishnu, elevating him to the status of Isvara or even of the formless Brahman. His main concern, however, was to express loving devotion to his deity (Sen, 1961, p.101). His deity was not necessarily unique, however, as he showed a relatively open attitude to the possibility of other deities as long as the supremacy of Rama was not compromised (Ling, 1968, p.326). For him the name of Rama was the essence of the supreme deity and all else was subservient to it.

In assessing Carpenter's method of integrating Hinduism into his evolutionary scheme one must take into account the restrictions within which he had to work. As I have shown, Hinduism was not the religion he chose as the major focus of study. Buddhism, particularly in its Theravadin form, was the religion about which Carpenter was most expert. For Carpenter, Hinduism was less advanced than Buddhism and as such was less attractive to him. Carpenter had expended his energies in mastering Pali and thus he became a competent Pali scholar. He was unable to match that ability in his knowledge of Sanskrit.

Carpenter's work with Hinduism was dependent upon the work of other scholars and this did effect some loss of credibility. This did not mean, however, that he did not have a distinctive role to play. Carpenter approached Hinduism with the view in mind that it represented a significant contribution to religious understanding. For him it was

not just an ancient religious culture confined to one nation. It was, on the contrary, evidence of humanity's evolution in its knowledge and relationship with God as it struggles to find meaning in natural phenomena. Carpenter looked within Hinduism to find a moving forward, and he believed that he had found it. Hinduism was a step, though an early step, towards a fuller divine disclosure that came with "advanced" manifestations.

What is surprising about Carpenter is that he did not allow Hinduism to impact upon his Unitarianism. Hinduism was for him a subject for study that he sought to treat with objectivity. He thus kept Hinduism at a scholarly distance. He did not consider the possibility of allowing Hindu philosophy to influence his own religion, as Emerson had done, for example, in the latter's treatment of Hindu texts. He did applaud the developments in thinking that had led to the formation of the Brahmo Samaj, but he made no claims for points of contact between Hinduism and Unitarianism. His own agenda prevented him from doing so. His belief that Buddhism was at a more advanced stage than Hinduism meant that he found more to praise in Pure Land Buddhism than in sects such as the Brahmo Samaj, despite their obvious Unitarian influences.

Conclusion

The consequence of Carpenter's presentation of Hinduism is that, although he believed that Hinduism was at an early stage of evolutionary development, he nevertheless treated the religion with sympathy. It was necessary for him to do so in order for his agenda to have meaning. This meant that Unitarians were subsequently given permission to treat Hinduism seriously and sympathetically. For Carpenter, Hinduism had a historical purpose in an evolutionary plan. For later Unitarians it meant a serious consideration of Hindu philosophy as something insightful and worthy of adaptation.

Carpenter, then, had a distinct contribution to make to the understanding of Hinduism as part of the evolutionary scheme. He was the first British Unitarian to deal with the mediaeval reform movements of Hinduism. Carpenter was the first British Unitarian to popularise Hindu teachings beyond the Unitarian movement. Most importantly of all, Carpenter was the first British Unitarian to claim wholeheartedly that Hinduism was historically purposeful and a manifestation of religion that, like his own liberal Christianity, was part of the divine plan for humankind.

CHAPTER 6

AN ASSESSMENT OF CARPENTER

Introduction

The nature of Carpenter's Christian theology, and particularly of his distinctive evolutionary theory, has now been presented. What this final chapter seeks to do is to assess Carpenter's work as a whole. I shall do this in several ways. Firstly, I shall reflect on the coherence of Carpenter's evolutionary scheme. I shall then consider how far the inter-faith movement reflects the working out of Carpenter's evolutionary scheme. This will be followed by an assessment of his contribution to the inter-faith movement, his contribution in the field of evolution, his work in Comparative Religion in general, and his place in changing the direction of the Unitarian movement.

Carpenter's Evolutionary Scheme

In order to be able adequately to assess Carpenter's contribution to Comparative Religion it is necessary to consider overall the implications of his evolutionary approach. One must question just how coherent was his distinctive form of evolutionary theory and why it was used as a basis for dealing with other religions. Carpenter also sought to explain past religious development by means of his evolutionary theory but conjectured very little about how the religions may progress in the future. There is value, therefore, in trying to create a picture of what may be the future condition of the religions should his approach be actualised. This would then present us with an understanding of what Carpenter's grand scheme was trying to indicate.

It has been made clear in the thesis that Carpenter's evolutionary theory was his own, although he did not himself suggest that it was anything different from the prevailing theory of the times. Carpenter's understanding of how evolution worked, as has already been discussed, was that there was a divinely planned growth of the different religions. This growth began with tribal religion and moved in stages towards a monotheism that expressed itself in written texts and was concerned with ethical values. In his view, owing to the need for human cooperation in the divine plan, progress was not steady. There was thus a degree of hesitation and falling back that meant that some religions were more advanced than others. As the thesis has emphasised, in Carpenter's view, it was Unitarian Christianity that was the most advanced religious expression although this imperfect form of religion would ultimately give way to a purer religion in the future.

A major difficulty with Carpenter's evolutionary scheme is the perverse nature of human development as he presented it. It is hard to conceive of humanity progressing when there is huge regression. If there had been major degeneration within religion then it is difficult to accept that there has been steady evolutionary progress. Evolutionary theory does not usually allow for regression yet regression is a vital element in Carpenter's scheme. In most of the religions Carpenter examined there was evidence of regression. This regression did not appear to be merely a pause in development but a fundamental deterioration from a holding of values considered representative of advanced religion to a position akin to primal religion.

All the major religions, in Carpenter's view, suffered from massive deterioration. The "Golden Age" of Hinduism, with its Vedic theism, gave way to the image worship and ritualism of later devotion. In Carpenter's view, later advances were a restoration of that faith, not the creation of something new. Buddhism deteriorated from an ethical culture to one involving a complex system of metaphysics (1904a, p.5).

Christianity deteriorated when Jesus, in Carpenter's view now unjustifiably deified, was seen only "through the haze of later legends" (1907c, p.134). Even Islam, about which Carpenter wrote little, was subject to the later creation of myth to support its claims (1907c, p.132). These changes were serious and substantial. They indicated major reverses from the purer faith that Carpenter felt was present in earlier forms to manifestations of religion that were fanciful and dependent upon myths. Carpenter was writing more like the traditional Christian, rather than the Unitarian, with a belief in a once perfect state, a fall from grace and a subsequent progression towards redemption.

Carpenter's resolution of the problem of deterioration was to consider the issue on general lines. He was looking at human history on a very broad time scale. Overall, in Carpenter's view, there was evolutionary progress. Carpenter was an unrepentant optimist. He believed that humanity was becoming more aware of its oneness and its responsibility for the whole human race. Carpenter held this view even despite the ravages of the Great War. In fact, it was only a short time after the War when Carpenter declared that the whole world community was coming together as a united society (1924b, p.148). He did admit that the war spirit would die hard, and he blamed this on an inherent egotism. To counterbalance this, said Carpenter, was a growing confidence in the ability of contemporary humanity to create a harmonious and inclusive world community (1924b, p.155).

Carpenter's position was that the religions were in actual fact coming closer to one another and changing in accordance with mutual principles. The creation of the Brahmo Samaj, for example, was something Carpenter upheld as evidence of this. The Brahmo Samaj was connected with its Vedic roots yet was able to harmonise them with Western ideals (1912b, p.6). For Carpenter, in the case of the Brahmo Samaj, it was a matter of an Indian religious tradition moving closer to Unitarianism, the exemplar of evolutionary advancement. Also, as will be indicated later in the chapter, cooperation of the religions in organisations such as the International Congress of Free Christianity and

Religious Progress suggested to Carpenter that there was a harmonious coming together of the religions as they progressed towards their unknown but divinely-appointed destiny.

The next question to be asked about Carpenter's evolutionary scheme is why he chose to use evolutionism at all, or at least why he chose to call his scheme an evolutionary one. In seeking to answer this question it is necessary to recall that the evolutionary theory was overwhelming at the time when Carpenter was first formulating his scheme. The influence of the evolutionists was far-reaching and long lasting and it is inevitable that Carpenter should seek to express his ideas within an evolutionary linguistic framework. That his form of evolutionism appeared perverse is due to the fact that he never tried to reconcile his views with evolutionary science. That was not his task. His role was that of populariser and propagandist. For his work to be effective, and in order to secure a hearing for his scheme, he needed to be in harmony with the *Zeitgeist*.

It could be argued that Carpenter served his cause badly by furthering his theories within an environment that was not a congenial repository for such a radical approach. Carpenter quite clearly wanted to reach his students and readers by starting from what he considered to be a popular position. On the other hand, starting from a popular position has not always been the most successful means that Unitarians have used to promote their radical views. Unitarians have rarely found it necessary to find a popular platform from which to expound radical departures from accepted positions. In Carpenter's case one can only conclude that he believed sincerely that he was developing his unusual approach from a genuine evolutionary position. The overwhelming nature of the evolutionary theory permeated Carpenter's outlook without his full participation in its scientific development. Evolution was the atmosphere of the time and Carpenter worked within that environment. The paradox, however, is that Carpenter was not really an integral part of that environment. Carpenter envisaged his

scheme as sitting peacefully side by side with scientific evolutionism. There was, however, no engagement and no genuine encounter.

A second factor in considering why Carpenter chose to express his views through the language of evolution is that Unitarians tended to be great enthusiasts for the evolutionary theory. When Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) Unitarianism was the religious movement most enthused by its claims (Holt, 1938, p.344). Even many years after Carpenter's death evolution held a great fascination for Unitarians, many of them even sharing Carpenter's view that God was the creator of the evolutionary process (Hall, 1962, p.116). Unitarianism and evolutionism have always appeared to sit closely together. Even Carpenter was unable to break free, nor did he wish to do so, from the tightly constructed Unitarian environment that sought to reconcile itself with the most advanced scientific theories. It was as if, speaking as a Unitarian, he was thus speaking also as an evolutionist. It is inevitable, therefore, that Carpenter should seek to encounter other religions from an evolutionary perspective.

There is another explanation for Carpenter's desire to use evolutionism in the development of his distinct theory. Being an optimist, Carpenter believed that all the religions of the world had a purpose. By speaking in evolutionary terms he found it possible to include all religions in his grand scheme. Eastern religions could not be dismissed as false but were simply outworn by later developments. Eastern religions were subject to the same movements of thought and understanding as all other religions. By acknowledging them and encountering them, humanity would be able to develop a clearer vision of the direction in which it was heading. Evolutionism was thus a device, a mechanism to impress upon the reader and student the value of the contributions made by other religions.

In seeking to discover why Carpenter spoke in evolutionary terms it is necessary to consider the fact that, for him, evolutionism was a sort of parallel to radical

Unitarianism. The development of Carpenter's own theology, represented by the stages in his move towards a less elevated Christology, is paralleled by the stages of development in other religions as illustrated by Carpenter's studies. In Chapter 2, I showed how Carpenter's theology in his early career was focused on an interpretation of traditional Christian doctrines. He then began vigorously to challenge the traditional Christian position on the status of Jesus. Carpenter preached instead a "messiahship" that was justified by the quality of those messianic teachings. Ultimately, his theology became less argumentative, more reflective and more dependent upon reason.

In the light of his convictions as a promoter of Unitarian religion it can be seen that there was some coherence in using evolutionism as a vehicle to preach the advanced position of Unitarian Christianity. In a sense, in conclusion, Carpenter was not teaching evolutionary theory. He was simply using the popularity of the evolutionary theory, as he saw it, to promote a form of religious progress that elevated his own religious position and that accepted the relevance of the other religions of the world. Carpenter's method may have been unambiguously partisan, but it did have a positive role in bringing to his readers the knowledge of other religious systems. Because of the intertwining of the two traditions of evolutionism and Unitarianism this meant that Carpenter's scheme had a more welcome reception in some quarters than others. To his Unitarian hearers Carpenter was an innovator, whilst other contemporaries treated his work with a variety of opinions, ranging from respect through neglect to open scepticism.

There is more to consider, however, when reflecting on the coherence of Carpenter's evolutionary scheme. It is valuable to make use of his principles to determine what could be the character of religion in the future when evolutionary factors have operated once again to bring humanity further forward to full self-realisation.

As noted in the thesis, Carpenter acknowledged that evolutionary progress had come about by stages, characterised by the different religious traditions of the world. Bearing this in mind it should be relatively simple to determine the character of the next stage to come. Carpenter did not, of course, paint a picture of what that next stage would be like, as he could not have known, but a general indication of what it could feature should be possible if the principles he held onto firmly are considered. The difficulties, as shall be seen, arise from a number of questions that are not resolved by looking back and examining Carpenter's speculations.

The first question to be raised about Carpenter's speculations concerning future evolutionary growth is connected with the significance of sacred texts. As Carpenter characterised advanced religion as being dependent on sacred texts it would therefore seem inevitable that, according to his model, the next evolutionary stage should involve such dependence. Carpenter was always a Biblical Unitarian, though there was in his theology a great deal of room for interpretation and the application of critical insight, personal intuition (1903c, p.242) and experience (1909b, p.247). The question arises as to where dependence would lie in the next evolutionary stage. If Unitarian Christianity were the most advanced manifestation of religion then it may be that it was the Christian Scriptures that Carpenter had in mind. If, however, there were to be movement beyond Unitarian Christianity then it could be a different set of texts that would fulfil the necessary function.

It is interesting to note that Carpenter did not consider the possibility of the sacred texts of modern religious groups performing the guiding role. Carpenter was aware, for example, of the growing Baha'i religion. The Baha'i religion did produce its own sacred texts bearing many of those values and principles that Carpenter believed to be vital. It was monotheistic, for example. It also valued other religions as different phases of revelation, it taught social justice and social improvement, and it believed in

the forward progress of humanity. What should also have appealed to Carpenter was the religion's breadth of inspiration. It recognised the integrity of the great world religions with particular recognition, as was the case with Carpenter, of the overtly monotheistic religions.

There are two reasons why Carpenter did not adopt the Baha'i scriptures as the sacred texts for the next evolutionary stage. Firstly, Baha'i writings were not formulated as scriptures at this stage. Some of Baha'u'llah's writings were available, but these were available only piecemeal and were not, as now, formulated into an approved canon. The second reason why Carpenter did not accept Baha'i writings as the sacred texts for the next evolutionary stage is best answered by considering the status he awarded sacred literature. The dependence on sacred texts did not mean for him that the future religion would be dependent upon the texts of one particular religion. He certainly did believe that sacred texts would be necessary for the provision of "great sustenance for religious affection" (1893b, p.843). He felt, however, that there was a need for a new concept of sacred literature. This would be a literature that was not confined to any faith but, and this is a significant point, "was capable of application in diverse modes to all" (1893b, p.843). This sacred literature would teach the supreme importance of conscience and that the universal moral experience was the first and broadest element of revelation (1893b, p.845). It would also affirm that life itself is a mode of revelation and that a higher life of wisdom and righteousness was possible for humanity (1893b, 848). It would also teach the continuous nature of God's revelation (1893b, 849).

Carpenter, then, did have some idea of what the sacred literature of the next stage of evolution would look like. It is not possible to conjecture, however, whether it would thus be an anthology or a simple recognition of the shared values of the world's religious literature. Carpenter believed that there was a movement towards an understanding between the religions that could lay the foundations for agreement on such an issue. His views had no concrete form but the vision of the future religion was

therefore one based on his perception of a growing mutuality between the religions that would allow for a sharing of some ideas and, inevitably, a discarding of others. A literature based on those ideas, whether in a formally agreed format, or a sharing of knowledge about the commonly accepted tenets of faith, was thus in Carpenter's mind quite feasible.

The second question about the next evolutionary stage concerns the principle, integral to Carpenter's evolutionary scheme, of degeneration. It is important to ask whether the principle of degeneration could apply to the next evolutionary stage. If it could, then the immediate future could involve a falling back in religious progress. An examination of Carpenter's works suggests that he felt that the contrary was the more likely outcome. Ever the optimist, Carpenter believed, as will be considered later in the chapter, that the religions were now coming together to bring into being a united fellowship of believers whose law was "cooperation" (1910d, p.23). The 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions was evidence also for Carpenter that there was a positive step forward towards this growing union.

If an attempt is made to interpret events since Carpenter's death in the light of his optimistic expectations then certain developments could be said to support his viewpoint. There are now a number of inter-religious organisations throughout the world that bring the different religions into closer contact. Knowledge of the beliefs and practices of other religions is now widespread. Evolution could be said to be actualised by means of interaction amongst the religions as well as cooperation of the nations through new political and diplomatic unions. If events are read in such a positive way then it would seem that degeneration is not an expectation for the foreseeable future. There are other ways of interpreting events that would suggest, either that Carpenter was mistaken, or that the current stage of evolutionary development is one of degeneration. Furthermore, the statements of the leaders of the larger Christian churches indicate no readiness to reject the doctrines that divide them.

With the rise of religious exclusivism has come a contraction of overtly liberal religion. Unitarianism is a very small movement in Britain with about 6,500 adherents. In the United States, where it has always had a much greater impact, it is still a comparatively minor denomination with about 150,000 adherents. The Brahmo Samaj, the religious group that Carpenter felt was on the verge of achieving a real role in Indian life, is a very small movement of only a few thousand adherents (Ferm, 1976, p.87) and attracts new members only from certain classes of Indian. It is difficult to imagine how Carpenter could have interpreted such trends with optimism.

In order to come to any conclusion about whether Carpenter's scheme was coherent it is necessary to recall one important aspect of it. Although Carpenter's grand evolutionary scheme was believed to be part of God's plan for humankind, it was dependent upon human cooperation. There was degeneration in religious history because human beings had not carried out their role in initiating, as co-creators with God, the next evolutionary stage. Human progress in the near future would not therefore be inevitable, as it required human effort. Carpenter certainly believed that the seeds of progress had been planted but, in his view, it took human strength to actualise it. "God grant us grace to welcome and use our opportunities, and for us the prayer, 'Thy kingdom come', will be fulfilled" (1910d, p.24). In his essay on world ethics he made it clear that animosities "can" be conquered rather than "will" be (1924b, p.155). In his address to the 1893 Parliament he hoped that the congress "may" help to bring about the "day of mutual understanding" (1893b, p.849).

The issue of degeneration cannot, then, be solved very easily. The coherence of Carpenter's scheme is not affected by whether one believes that humanity is about to take a leap forward in evolutionary development, or whether degeneration is taking place. The faculty required to make a judgment is simply one of interpretation of events.

Carpenter and the Inter-Faith Movement

It is impossible to assess Carpenter's contribution to the inter-faith movement without taking into account his theological views, particularly as regards his distinctive position on evolution. As will be seen, it was almost inevitable that, embracing the world's religions into his scheme, Carpenter should treat the inter-faith movement also as evidence for the working out of God's plan for humankind. It has already been noted that Carpenter took a role in the practical work of the inter-faith movement in its early days. For example, he had a paper presented to the World's Parliament of Religions (1893b), the world's first gathering of representatives from different religions. He was also the first President of the world's first inter-faith organisation, the International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religious thinkers and Workers, and he addressed its congresses on a number of occasions (1901; 1910c; 1911b). Carpenter always considered such meetings to be of crucial importance. For him, however, there were deeper reasons for participation in inter-faith activity.

The Inter-Faith Movement as Evidence of Convergence

To understand Carpenter it is necessary to examine what the inter-faith movement meant to him and how he viewed it as the evolutionary development of religion towards an ultimate convergence of the religions. This would be characterised by a coming together of the world's religions leading to the advent of the ideal religion of the future. This would be, in Carpenter's view, the consummation of the divine plan for humanity.

On many occasions, Carpenter had indicated that there was already a common religious awareness that would form the basis of such a future convergence. There was, then, said Carpenter, a unity beneath the diversity, a shared religious awareness that had yet to be acknowledged and concretised. The task of the inter-faith movement was to remove inessential and divisive elements of individual religions and to lay bare those

basic truths on which a universal religion could be built. This view had been stated earlier in the United States and was also similar to the position of Freeman Clarke. In the spirit of the Transcendentalists, Clarke commended the so-called “heathens” as contributing to the global collection of wisdom and experience that would lead to a consciousness of a single religion underlying all current manifestations of religion (Clarke, 1871, p.12).

That Carpenter’s views had some kind of credibility is attested by the many speeches suggesting something similar at the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions. One example of this is the paper delivered by a prominent Jewish rabbi and scholar. He scorned the universalistic claims of religions such as Islam, Buddhism and Christianity, arguing that the universal religion is still to come. Such a unity, he suggested, was the destiny of humanity.

Race and nationality cannot circumscribe the fellowship of the
larger communion of the faithful, a communion destined to
embrace in one covenant all the children of man (Hirsch,
1893, p.1304).

Carpenter, then, was not alone. The question must be asked, however, as to how firmly this conviction was to be embraced by the developing inter-faith movement. If Carpenter was justified in witnessing the beginnings of the acknowledgement of a common religious foundation and its transformation into a future universal faith, and if the inter-faith movement was the vehicle for that transformation, then that conviction would need to be a basic premise of the inter-faith movement.

It is interesting to note that that conviction was indeed held by a number of participants in inter-faith activities for many years after Carpenter’s death. This is not necessarily true of all inter-faith organisations, but it is the case with the congresses of the International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers with which Carpenter had been associated. In 1958 the International Council,

having then changed its name to the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom, held its sixteenth congress in Chicago. Several aims for the gathering were agreed upon, but one of them, though not clearly defined, was “to unite religion” (International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom, 1958, p.19). This approach meant a rejection of the uniqueness of one’s own religious position and instead a celebration of a common inheritance.

If the inter-faith movement had taken up wholeheartedly Carpenter’s conviction of a movement towards a universal religion of the future then that principle would have survived the various changes of direction by the different inter-faith organisations over the years. In reality, however, there is little evidence of participants in inter-faith work seeking to work for a universal religion. The emphasis in recent years has been on dialogue and a celebration of religious diversity. It is interesting to note that, in 1969, under its new name, the International Association for Religious Freedom, principles were adopted that focused on “The Dialogue of World Religions” (International Association for Religious Freedom, 1969, p.34). Other organisations, such as the World Congress of Faiths, founded in 1936, the Temple of Understanding, founded in 1960, and the World Conference on Religion and Peace, founded in 1970, have sought dialogue as a major aim. Much of the modern inter-faith work has been directed, not towards a rejection of the uniqueness of one’s tradition, but a greater appreciation of it.

If we engage in the hermeneutics of inter-faith dialogue, we may find a more meaningful and creative understanding of our own tradition. That is to say, through inter-religious dialogue we Buddhists are on the way to being better Buddhists in the same way that Christians are on the way to being better Christians (Nemoto, 1999, p.11).

There are reasons why Carpenter’s belief in a convergence of the religions could not satisfactorily engage the inter-faith movement. Firstly, there is the inference that

reason could overcome the differences between the religions. Carpenter seemed to suggest that religions could come together by sharing ideas on monotheism, ethics, social awareness and personal salvation. This suggests that convergence would come about after an agreement on *ideas*. The rich and diverse practices of the communities that have given shape to religious traditions would then appear to be superfluous. In Carpenter's scheme, convergence would be achieved by intellectual processes alone. It is difficult, however, to think of the different religions as being bound up with sets of ideas. In Carpenter's approach, when different religions began to share ideas then there would be grounds to believe a move was being made towards convergence. It is difficult to believe, however, that the encounter of world religions is concerned with intellectual argument. Such a belief assumes that each world religion is a carefully packaged unit with a coherent and identifiable set of teachings. It dismisses the reality of the personal faith experiences of its adherents.

A second difficulty with Carpenter's approach is that what some religions consider as fundamental is treated by others as of marginal concern. The recognition of a universal religious consciousness by Carpenter, the faculty that would be tapped in order to create that future universal religion, could be acknowledged as little more than an absolutising of his own beliefs. The values that Carpenter identified as universal were those he acknowledged as part of his own faith tradition. He then simply made them normative for all. The difficulty is that to accept what Carpenter believed as essential is not necessarily the same as what those religions themselves acknowledged as essential. Carpenter tended to equate his vision of the truth with *the* truth. This leaves him open to the charge of inadvertent dogmatism.

The Inter-Faith Movement and Revelation

For Carpenter, a step towards the convergence of the religions would be made possible by a new understanding of the concept of revelation. This is the claim he made

at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions (1893b). For Carpenter, revelation was to be understood in the way that ideas of ethics, inspiration and incarnation had been commonly acknowledged by the different religions. Carpenter's call was for the world community to seek a revelation of the divine within the teachings of the religions on these three issues. This universal acknowledgement within the world's different traditions would bring about recognition that the heritage of the world's religions was the heritage of all.

The difficulty with Carpenter's vision here is that he restricted the idea of revelation to something discovered within the sacred writings of the religions. For Carpenter, scriptural records were crucial. He cited, for example, the case of the cults of ancient Rome, and the numerous religions of Greece, that came and went without establishing a permanent place in the life of those nations. In Carpenter's view this was because they had no written scriptures to establish themselves. Christianity was also cited as an example. He admitted that it may have lived on without scriptural support but it would have had much less impact. "How could it have sunk into the heart of nations and served as the impulse and goal of endeavour?" (1893b, p.843).

The restriction of the notion of revelation to written material brings with it a number of problems. Firstly, there is the insurmountable problem of detaching a doctrine from the religious and cultural packaging in which it occurs. Revelation for some traditions is inextricably connected with a concept that is alien to others. It is difficult to isolate something that may be accepted by all from a philosophical tool that to all but the adherents of that religion is a conundrum. The Hindu concept of the *trimurti*, its association with other gods and their identification as the hidden self or *atman*, as detailed in the Maitri Upanishad (5, 1-2), is a form of revelatory teaching that would appal those who envisage a clear separation between God and humanity. The Buddhist teaching on the achievement of *nirvana*, the loss of identification with the self, a state beyond existence and non-existence, is a vital element of that religion. This was

something that happened to the Buddha himself, the *parinirvana*, as indicated in the Majjhima Nikaya (245-246). Again, such vital revelatory teaching is certainly anathema to some traditions, Christianity included, who believe that revelation has confirmed the reality of the continuation of the individual self.

Secondly, if revelation is to be a notion shared by the world's religions, then there is an issue as to which scriptures are to be acknowledged as authoritative. The question of divine inspiration, and to what extent it can be considered as infallible, is a question that has divided the Christian community for a very long time. Other traditions, such as Islam, have yet to face this issue before the world community can begin to accept a common approach to written revelation.

Having regard to Carpenter's own personal history, it is difficult to understand why he should restrict the notion of revelation to the written word. If the inter-faith movement were to create a universal religion then it is possible to acknowledge that there could be within it a place for direct revelation. Carpenter himself admitted the significance of it in his own life. His career as a minister was to be a drab, lifeless functional profession founded on intellectual conviction. That was changed when he enjoyed a mystical experience, when he was a student, whilst walking in the Welsh mountains. "The sense of a direct relation to God then generated in my soul has become a part of my habitual thought and feeling" (Herford, 1929, p.10). This personal revelation was of supreme significance to Carpenter. In Carpenter's own writings there does not seem to be a justification for rejecting revelation as applied to persons or events. "Can a part of history be a *heilsgeschichte* unless the whole of it is?" (Williams, 1993, p.91). A new universal religion that did not recognise such experiences as revelatory would, in accordance with Carpenter's own personal history, be somewhat diminished.

The other factor involved in this issue concerns the acknowledgement and the authentication of such personal revelation in the theoretical universal religion. Carpenter

expressed no opinion on the use of authorities that could give direction to the new universal religion. The inter-faith movement could have accepted unto itself such a role. In fact, this has not taken place. The different organisations, and there are a number of them, have sought to allow religions to speak for themselves, to nurture their own identity, and to look for issues on which to unite that do not impinge on their distinctive doctrinal traditions.

The Place of Jesus in the Inter-Faith Movement

As made clear in the thesis, Carpenter believed that Unitarian Christianity was the most advanced religious manifestation so far and that it would be the vehicle for the creation of the ideal religion of the future. What the religion of the future would look like Carpenter did not know. Even his own Unitarianism would have served its purpose as it ushered in something greater. He did believe, however, that “the religion of Jesus”, a simple form of Christianity based on the teachings of Jesus rather than on doctrines concerning his person, was the crown of religion, the purest religious expression for the interim period. “Foremost among them, at least in this stage of our development, is the Christianity we love” (1911b, p.113). For Carpenter, then, the inter-faith movement was the means of elaborating this liberal faith and extending it to receptive audiences.

Carpenter’s position on this issue was made clear by the addresses he gave to the congresses of the International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers. At the 1903 Congress in Amsterdam there were few attenders from other religions. At that gathering Carpenter claimed that association with the fundamental teachings of Jesus would help other religions strip away some of their distinctive characteristics. The ideas of Jesus, he said, would gather strength (1911b, p.112).

The International Council was meant to be genuinely representative of the different religions and, eventually, other believers did begin to join. Over 2,000 people,

including representatives from Judaism, Sikhism and Buddhism, attended the Berlin Congress in 1910. Nevertheless, in Carpenter's view it had a vital role to play in bringing closer that ideal religion of the future because of what he believed was the recognition of the central place of Unitarian Christianity. "Congress was a success because the vision of a free Christianity became clearer" (1910c, p.5).

Though new inter-faith organisations were set up in later years with their own premises and goals, the International Council followed Carpenter's lead in seeking inter-faith co-operation based on the need for unity based on liberal Christianity. It was not until 1969 that the reference to "Liberal Christianity" was removed from the organisation's title when it became known simply as the International Association for Religious Freedom. Earlier, in 1936, the leader of the Dutch delegation made clear his belief that the task of that particular inter-faith body was to seek a consensus based on a Liberal Christian premise.

We realise that it has to fulfil a real task in the present world situation. This task is not only to unite the liberal Christians and other religious Liberals the world over, but to give testimony of what Free Christianity is and strives after (1936, p.3).

It would seem that Carpenter's priority was adopted by at least one branch of the inter-faith movement. This was not to last, however, as growing encounter with the other religions led to a different approach. The International Association for Religious Freedom no longer seeks to promote a non-dogmatic form of Christianity as a basis on which to build inter-faith co-operation. Instead it encourages "a free, critical and honest affirmation of one's own religious tradition" (International Association for Religious Freedom, 1987, p.29).

Carpenter's ideal, then, of elevating Unitarian Christianity as the vehicle for the transformation of religious differences into the universally accepted faith of the future

was not ultimately borne out by events. There is one way, however, in which Carpenter's vision may be much closer to being realised. That is the issue of ethics and social justice. It is important to one's perception of Carpenter's role to assess how far the inter-faith movement has taken unto itself this particular issue.

Ethics and Social Justice in the Inter-Faith Movement

In earlier chapters of the thesis I have identified the centrality of ethics and social progress as vital criteria, in Carpenter's thinking, for the judgment of whether the religions are at an advanced stage of evolutionary development. He believed that the universal moral experience was the first and most powerful element of revelation. This was one of the major themes of his paper for the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions (1893b, p.843). On other occasions too he said that the religion of the future would arise, not by a merger of doctrines but by an "approximation" of ethical aims (1911b, p.111). Together with social justice, the working out of ethical values would be a common aspiration (1916a, p.38).

It is on this issue that Carpenter's approach seems to have had an impact on the direction of the inter-faith movement. At the first gathering of the International Council in 1901, Carpenter spoke about the state of liberal religion at the start of the new century. In his view there was a new religious consciousness, a growing awareness of the need for social justice (Carpenter, 1901). This was a theme he took up at the 1910 Berlin Congress when he asserted that the world's religions would come closer together when they recognised their common power to influence social and ethical values. "Among the themes which excited the most eager interest were its place in education, its share in the social order, its influence on peace" (1910c, p.4).

The International Council, under its various names, continued to place social and ethical concerns at the centre of its activities. The 1907 Congress, addressed by Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910), considered how the values now being adopted by the inter-

faith movement had played their part in the abolition of slavery. The Congress then committed itself to pursue social righteousness and "perfect liberty" (Eliot, 1907, p.48). The organisation has continued since then to give social and ethical values a high priority. The other inter-faith organisations have done the same. Many of them have collaborated to promote shared aims. An example of this was the declaration of 1993 as the Year of Inter-Religious Understanding and Co-operation.

It would not be true to say that such bodies have adopted ethical and social concerns simply because of Carpenter's strong promotion of them in his time as a major contributor to the inter-faith movement. It does, however, indicate that something of his vision has remained. There are certainly no signs of a growing organic merger of the religions. In fact, there are developments that could be interpreted as contradictory signs. There is a growing exclusivism in some forms of religion manifested in some cases in extreme behaviour. Nonetheless, the religions are encountering one another to a degree that was not possible a hundred years ago. There are no signs of doctrinal unity, no eschewing of those elements of religion that Carpenter thought necessary in order to bring closer the ideal religion of the future. What there is, however, is a closer understanding of the need to set ethical and social standards within which the religions of the world can operate. This is perhaps Carpenter's greatest legacy as far as the inter-faith movement is concerned

Carpenter's Contribution to Comparative Religion

Having taken into account Carpenter's evolutionary scheme and how it influenced his perception of the inter-faith movement, it is now necessary to assess Carpenter's work in Comparative Religion as a whole. His scheme influenced how he presented other religions. Despite this, his contribution can be judged on its own merits.

The Role of Other Religions

A major characteristic of Carpenter's work was his embracing of other religions into his view of history. All religious expressions had relevance and a meaningful role in his grand scheme. This meant recognition of a oneness of purpose between the religions. Religions were no better or no worse than others but were simply at different stages of the same movement towards the unknown destiny determined by God. Carpenter thus rejected the notion of a dichotomy between true and false religions. As has already been noted, he fiercely denounced Monier-Williams for the latter's categorising of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam as "false religions" (1893b, p.848; 1900d, p.7; 1925a, p.15).

Carpenter's inclusive approach to other religions is a contrast even to Unitarians who had served scholarship well by making the West aware of the religions of the East. As a Transcendentalist, Freeman Clarke had sought for meaning in the teachings of religions other than Christianity. Nevertheless, he still categorised some other religions as "heathenism" (1871, p.14), he graded them in accordance with whether they were "ethnic religions" or "catholic religions", and he claimed that only Christianity possessed the whole truth of which the other religions possessed only parts (1883, p.373).

Carpenter's approach to other religions was different. There was no rivalry between the religions in their claims for teaching the truth as, for him, religious understanding was based upon a quite different premise. God's plan for humankind was about a gradual unfolding of his purpose. This was received in different ways in different ages and there was thus no dichotomy between truth and falsehood. There were simply different levels of awareness. The apparently confused and diverse religious scene was thus actually a theatre of order and progression. This was significantly different from the rejection of the claims of other religions that were being made by scholars such as Freeman Clarke.

When one seeks to identify what it was about Carpenter's writings that gave him a distinctive place in the History of Religions one is struck by his authority on Pali and the ancient Pali texts. In fact, it is this particular field of study that is recognised by some as being where Carpenter's most significant achievements were to be found (Long, 1986, p.281). It must not be forgotten just how timely Carpenter's Pali skills were. Not until the latter part of the nineteenth century was there any significant number of primary Pali sources available. Until the founding of the Pali Text Society in 1881, most of the ancient texts written in Pali had been left unedited and untranslated throughout the universities of Europe. Not only were they considered to be the best authorities for the early history of Buddhism but they also revealed vast details of the folklore, religion and language of the Indian people living at some time around 400-250BCE. To undertake the task of editing any of the Pali texts was thus a major contribution, both in terms of the enormity of the work involved, and in the importance of the project to the study of early Buddhism.

A close look at the report of the foundation of the Pali Text Society will reveal that Carpenter was not originally considered as a contributor to the project. Scholars with international eminence, such as Oldenberg, Müller and Rhys Davids, were recorded as having been recruited for the various tasks of editing and translating, scholars with well developed linguistic skills (Rhys Davids, 1897, pp. 233-234). Carpenter was not even an officer or committee member of the Society. He was able subsequently, however, to convince the Committee of the Society that his knowledge of Pali was of a sufficiently high standard to undertake the major work that was required.

That Carpenter was able to complete the vast editing project of the *Digha Nikaya* indicates the high level of competence recognised by his peers. Although Carpenter is not acknowledged as one of the greatest Pali scholars, his editing of ancient Pali manuscripts does suggest a particular scholarly skill requiring a high degree of

philological ability. Contributing to the pioneering work of making Pali texts available was a monumental undertaking and deserving of recognition.

It was not only philological skills that were required to deal adequately with the Pali texts. It was the nurturing of those critical and analytical abilities that could be applied to any text but that were particularly required with a collection of data as complex as the Pali texts. In this regard, Carpenter had what was needed. It must be remembered that he was a scholar in Biblical Studies as well as a scholar in Comparative Religion. The significance of this fact is that he was able to use his acknowledged biblical scholarship to serve the needs of the developing interest in the Pali texts. Carpenter's biblical skills were useful because of his interest in textual reconstruction. His interest in creating "documentary vocabularies", lists of words and expressions characteristic of the different documents, were put to use with the Pali texts. This was no easy task. The production of the *Digha Nikaya*, for example, was a painstaking thirty-year exercise that sought to analyse use of words and expressions in Pali in order to reproduce the documents in some kind of order.

Some of Carpenter's conclusions about the Buddhist texts, it has to be admitted, were speculative. He admitted himself that copies of ancient Buddhist texts were sometimes in error owing to copyists' lack of skill. Some passages, Carpenter claimed, were simply unintelligible and beyond reconstruction (1886b, p.viii). Nonetheless, any attempt to reconstruct the *Digha Nikaya* was a step forward. The significant point about Carpenter's work is that he gave greater importance to the establishment of the authentic text than he did to systematic comment upon it. Herein lies the difficulty with his work in this field. It is as if he either felt the texts would speak for themselves, or that the internal examination of the texts was a different kind of exercise requiring different skills. He did comment on the texts of the religions of the East, but in that regard he was not so dependent on his own work. Carpenter's role was the reconstruction of authentic

texts. Such reconstruction, he said, would allow for a greater trustworthiness of the documents in order that informed internal criticism could be then made (1903d, p.50).

Carpenter as a Populariser of Comparative Religion

Although Carpenter was not the originator of the new discipline, he was responsible for amplifying and popularising the subject, bringing it into the lives of many people through his writings. They are often characterised by the simplicity of expression, intended to appeal to the reader with no prior knowledge of the subject. An example of his simple, popular style is *Comparative Religion* (1913b), Carpenter's most popular work. It was published at a difficult time, just as the Great War was about to break out when the publication of books was affected by the needs of the military. Nonetheless, it had a wide circulation and went through five reprints, the final one taking place more than thirty years after the original publication date. It was also a useful source book for the further exploration of the subject. The appended bibliography alone was tremendously useful in indicating the scholarship available in 1913.

The attractive quality of Carpenter's writings can be evidenced by his avoidance of too technical an exposition. In "How Japanese Buddhism Appeals to a Christian Theist" (1906a), for example, he aimed for a simple rather than critical approach. He made valuable reflections, nevertheless, in comparing and contrasting the two religions. What was important about his style was that it enabled him to reach a more general readership than those who had already been introduced to the subject. Another example is to be found in his *Theism in Medieval India* (1921b). Though a monument of learning and of religious insight, it was nevertheless written in a lucid and attractive style, and well within the reach of the searching mind of most students. Carpenter's works were successful because of a style of language and an adept arrangement of material that made them accessible to a large number of people.

Although Carpenter wrote numerous essays, papers, lectures and books on Comparative Religion, his work was not received enthusiastically by the academic community. This is due to a number of factors that did not apply to other scholars working in the same field of enquiry. These factors need examination in order to allow Carpenter's contribution to be judged on its own merits.

One major reason why Carpenter's work received little acclaim beyond his own denomination is that his theological standpoint was a problem for some scholars. It has to be said that Unitarianism was not looked upon favourably in Oxford circles. Manchester College, though claiming to be a non-denominational academic establishment, was funded and staffed by Unitarians, and was used as a major learning centre for students for the Unitarian ministry. As such the academic politicians of the University of Oxford treated it as something of a pariah as at that time the College had no official status within the University. The teaching of Comparative Religion within Oxford, at Manchester College from 1876, and at Mansfield College from 1886, was thus in institutions that were not formal members of the University. Max Müller was a champion of the cause of Comparative Religion in Oxford but it must be remembered that he did not teach it himself.

That Carpenter was a Unitarian was therefore a problem in that his pioneering of Comparative Religion was compromised by his membership of a denomination that allowed, and even encouraged, the exploration of religious ideas beyond the mainstream of Christian doctrine. From a different point of view, it could be said that Carpenter's Unitarian position gave him the freedom to be sympathetic towards the beliefs of other religions, approaching them without the need or the fear of being compromised by unacceptable dogmas. According to Long, his Unitarian background was certainly an advantage.

Carpenter's Unitarian ethos enabled him to approach non-Christian faiths with an objective impartiality which makes him, in some respects, a harbinger of an attitude increasingly commended, even among committed Christians, in our present-day multi-faith world (1986, p.283).

Nonetheless, it would seem that, at least in Oxford circles, any academic with a distinctive liberal stance towards the other world religions had difficulty in gaining credibility.

A second reason for Carpenter's being considered obscure by the academic community lay in his apparent optimism. Without considering the difficulties and apparent inconsistencies in his presentation of his evolutionary scheme, for example, the very fact that he expressed himself in certainties became something of a difficulty. Carpenter's confidence in finding a principle to unite all the religions was not shared by other scholars. His affirmation, "that the whole study of the history of religion is now firmly established" (1913b, p.33) is the kind of confident claim that became unfashionable. Carpenter believed that the evolutionary theory was a foregone conclusion. Scholars today now question whether the evolutionary theory can be applied to the area of human thought or specifically to the area of religion. The idea of unbroken and steady progress from lower forms to higher seems less self-evident in the light of, for example, the wars of the twentieth century. Carpenter's claim that there was a theory around which the scholars could write was naïve and unsupported by fact.

On the positive side, it could be said that, because of Carpenter's optimism, his research was less hampered than those with preconceived ideas who sought to explore other religions merely so as to convert their followers to Christianity. He sought to find in other religions a revelation of God but this did not make him less attached to Christianity. As Unitarian Christianity was, in Carpenter's view, the most evolved manifestation of religion so far, he was able to remain convinced of the status of a

renewed Christianity that was cleared of superstition. His explorations of the great religions of the East convinced him of the supreme significance of Jesus. He found a sympathy between the religions and saw God working in them all, but he was no less a Christian. "Instead of his devotion to this study [i.e. Comparative Religion] making him less a believer in the gospel, it made him more a believer in it" (Hall, 1962, p.130).

A third problem for the academic community was Carpenter's insistence upon focusing only on those religions that were literate, as if pre-literate communities were of little value in religious history. He ignored a whole area of religious tradition and practice by omitting to comment, except briefly, on a whole range of religions. He did make some comments, though cursory, on the ancient systems of belief in Babylonia, Greece, Egypt and Persia (1911b, p.22f). He even made a brief reference to ancient Polynesia (1923, p.711). He showed no enthusiasm, however, for a consideration of the tribal religions, for example, of Africa or America. He was uninterested in primal religion except where they indicated a growing awareness of the ethical aspect of religious practice or where there was apparent evidence of a gradual move towards monotheism (1913b, p.131).

Carpenter was interested in exploring only those belief systems of communities that had sufficient written data. This may not be surprising when one considers that scholars did not travel much in the Victorian period and needed written material on which to base their researches. There were exceptions, however. W. Robertson Smith (1846-1894), for example, travelled extensively in the Near East and took an interest in ancient rituals, sacrifice and totemism. The work of Frazer cannot be underestimated, though he was criticised for attempting to understand primal societies without ever leaving his study in Cambridge (Sharpe, 1992, p.89). At this time E. B. Tylor (1832-1917) and R. R. Marett (1866-1943) were producing their anthropological studies that focused on primal societies. Carpenter was aware of their work (1913b, p.55 and p.202) yet chose to ignore the significance of pre-literate religious belief. This was a contrast to

Clarke, for example, who enthusiastically included all religions in his classification system. Carpenter, however, had insufficient interest in the primal religions. This did make it difficult to give credibility to his evolutionary claims when it was only the religions with a literary tradition that were included in his grand scheme.

A fourth problem for the academic community was the tendency that Carpenter had to draw conclusions that were not always supported by evidence. This was due to his enthusiasm for finding parallels between the religions. Sometimes it was a matter, not so much of drawing wrong conclusions, but of allowing the reader to draw conclusions that were not based on evidence. Thus, for example, Pure Land Buddhism was described as so similar to Protestant Christianity that Buddhism and Christianity were said to "have kissed each other" (1910b, p.664). Despite Carpenter's conviction of their value, parallels are not always the most appropriate transmission of information about the world's religions. Parallels focus attention on the concepts that are similar instead of on those that are of greatest importance to the religion in question. The concentration on doctrines similar to those of Christianity meant that other features of a religion were often overlooked simply because they were so different from Christian teaching. The use of parallels did enable Carpenter to present the teachings of the world's religions to a wide audience but this was done by sometimes giving a misleading representation of other religions.

As can be seen, therefore, there are concrete reasons for Carpenter's work as a scholar being overlooked by the academic world. These are in addition to the difficulties arising from his idiosyncratic use of the evolutionary theory. As a Unitarian, however, Carpenter's work has always been acknowledged and celebrated by his own denomination. His contribution to Unitarian Thought is the one field of activity where there is less disagreement about his importance.

Carpenter's Contribution to Unitarian Thought

Whatever history makes of Carpenter's contribution as a pioneer of the teaching of Comparative Religion, or of his work as a biblical scholar, there is no doubt that he will be recognised as a major figure in British Unitarian history. In order to understand his place in the development of Unitarian thinking, however, it is necessary to unravel the complex strands within nineteenth century Unitarianism and to consider how he related to other denominational figures of the day such as Martineau, Freeman Clarke and Emerson.

Carpenter and the New Unitarianism

Although the history of the British Unitarian movement is complex and diverse, it is possible to define some stages in theological developments in the period since the movement was formally identifiable, that is since the late eighteenth century. As noted in the first section of Chapter 2, from the days when Priestley's influence was strong, until the dominance of Martineau, Unitarianism was characterised by its Bible-based teachings, its dogmatic anti-trinitarianism, and its adherence to a high Christology. This high Christology recognised Jesus Christ as a divine figure, not the same person as God the Father, but nevertheless a figure who could be addressed as God. The second stage came with the influence of Martineau and his call for the supreme authority of reason and conscience. The Bible was still held in esteem but as a source of spiritual insight rather than as an authority.

At this juncture two different wings of the movement could be identified, the conservative wing that was still Bible-based and dogmatic, and the liberal wing that emphasised comprehensive tolerance and spiritual depth (Wilbur, 1952, pp.360f). It was with the liberal wing that Martineau was associated and, ultimately, it was the liberals who were to become the dominant force in late Victorian Unitarianism. Carpenter was very much an adherent of the liberal wing although his views were to liberalise that form

of Unitarianism even further. It must be remembered that Martineau had a Christology that, in Unitarian terms, was high. In Martineau's view, though Jesus was not the Messiah, he was nonetheless superior to the rest of humanity. Jesus had, said Martineau, through the course of his life and career, grown closer to God the Father and thus become more divine.

I think of it (i.e. Christ's incarnation) as an ever growing quantity, blending more and more of the Divine with the Human in him as his history deepened (Martineau, 1853b, p.349).

Carpenter's Christology was a contrast to Martineau's. His religion was still focused on Jesus, but on Jesus the man rather than on Jesus as a divinity. The place of Jesus was determined, not by any authority guaranteed by his person, but by the quality of his teachings on the relationship between God and humanity. This was a radical departure from Martineau's position and set Carpenter apart from the rest of the liberal wing of the movement. Carpenter's position could therefore be recognised as the beginnings of the third stage in the development of Unitarian thinking, that of the humanitarian view of Jesus.

At the end of the nineteenth century another stage could be identified, that of free religion or "universalism", a form of Unitarianism that did not focus specifically on the teachings of Jesus. Although Carpenter remained a Christian until the end his life one could posit the notion that he was, at least partly, responsible for this final stage towards a wider view of Unitarianism. In order to determine whether this is the case it is necessary to recall the developments in the United States. As early as 1867 a Free Religious Association had been formed, initially to turn Unitarianism into an inter-faith body championing free enquiry in religious matters (Marshall, 1999, pp.55f.). Emerson had also predated Carpenter with his explorations into Indian religion. Freeman Clarke

had similarly revealed sympathy for other religions to a degree not hitherto experienced in American Unitarianism.

To understand Carpenter's position it is important to remember that, in the Victorian era, American innovations did not easily translate to the British situation. There is no evidence that the Transcendentalist movement had much of an impact in Britain. Also, Carpenter differed from Emerson and Clarke in two ways. Firstly, the Transcendentalist movement had an uneasy relationship with the American Unitarian Association. For only two years did Emerson exercise a Unitarian ministry before he resigned and spent most of the rest of his life avoiding contact with any Unitarian institution. Even the Free Religious Association, though not directly connected with the Transcendentalist Movement, severed its links with Unitarianism when insufficient interest was shown in its aims. Carpenter, on the other hand, always had a recognised place in British Unitarianism, addressing Unitarian conferences and meetings and holding high office in its institutions.

Secondly, the theology of prominent American liberals such as Clarke was actually less radical than Carpenter's was. Clarke envisaged the coming together of the world's religions under the banner of liberal Christianity. Carpenter's understanding of Unitarianism was that it was the most advanced religious expression, but only so far. It was the means of drawing the religions together, but was an interim faith that would usher in a new religious environment in the future.

There were developments in British Unitarianism that were in some ways parallel to the theologies being established by the more extreme manifestations of American Unitarianism. Monotheism, for example, was not always held to be an essential element of Unitarian religion. The retention of pantheism and the embracing of Eastern spirituality were features of some forms of English Unitarianism during Carpenter's early years in the ministry (d'Alviella, 1886, p.88). Such views, however, were minor (Gow, 1928, pp.140-141). They were not supported by critical scholarship.

They were not founded on a genuine appreciation of the sacred works of the religions of the East. They also showed no appreciation of the historical route that Unitarianism had followed to reach its current place in history (d'Alviella, 1886, pp.88-89).

Carpenter may not have intended that Unitarianism should become such a diverse movement. His distinct theology, however, in identifying the need for movement in theological thought and understanding, and in embracing the religions of the world as integral elements of the divine plan, gave permission for such developments to take place. Unitarian historians have long credited Carpenter for being instrumental for effecting a stance more inclined to absorb the insights and reflections of the other world religions (Weatherall, 1929, p.119; Hall, 1962, p.130; Hewett, 1968, p.102).

The Importance of Carpenter to Unitarianism

To sum up Carpenter's contribution to Unitarian thinking it is necessary to recall that he has always been acknowledged as one of the most influential Unitarian figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. After his death in 1927 he was memorialised by the meetings of the Unitarian National Conference in such a way as to suggest that his contribution had been unique and far-reaching (Jones, 1946, p.85).

There are a number of reasons why Carpenter had a distinctive role to play in the development of Unitarian thinking and these are all inextricably intertwined with his passion for Comparative Religion.

Firstly, Carpenter was the first British Unitarian scholar to be acknowledged as having a critical understanding of other religions. There were other British Unitarians in the nineteenth century who took an interest in other religions but either none undertook more than a passing interest or their work was carried out later than Carpenter's. Armstrong began to take an interest in Buddhism (Armstrong, 1870) but later concentrated on his Christological and other Christian theological issues. R. Travers Herford (1860-1950) concentrated solely on Judaism and his books were produced much

later. At that particular stage in history, there was no other British Unitarian with Carpenter's credentials in Comparative Religion. Any such work was being carried out in the United States.

Secondly, Carpenter was the first British Unitarian to engage constructively with followers of other religions. He was not the first to meet and learn from other believers. After all, Lant Carpenter had made contact with Roy and Mary Carpenter had actually visited India. Estlin Carpenter, even though he made few visits abroad, and never visited India or the Far East, nonetheless responded to the belief stances of other religions by challenging them in some instances and by corresponding with them with a view to creating a constructive dialogue. Examples include his chairing of the meeting with Abdu'l'Baha of the Baha'i community (Balyuzi, 1971, 354), his response to an article by an eminent Buddhist scholar (Anesaki, 1905), comparing Buddhism and Christianity (1906a), and his challenging address to the anniversary meeting of the Brahmo Samaj, reminding them of the need to retain their historical Hindu roots (1912b). This kind of activity may now seem commonplace within Unitarianism, but in Carpenter's day it was unusual and innovative.

The third reason for Carpenter's place of importance within British Unitarianism is his apparent scholarly credibility. After the death of Martineau in 1900 it seemed that Unitarianism in Britain would lose something of its intellectual stimulus. The movement, upholding the authority of enlightened reason, needed scholars to give justification to the claims of Unitarians that it was a thinking faith given direction by modern learning. Carpenter seemed ably suited to fit that role. His exploration of other religions, still somewhat novel in Unitarianism, was the field in which he would be most recognised. His credibility was enhanced by his association with other scholars who had secured prominence in the field of Comparative Religion. He was thus a friend and associate of Rhys Davids, Max Müller, Tylor and Fairbairn (Long, 1986, p.274).

A fourth reason for Carpenter's place in British Unitarian history is the way that he applied his knowledge of other religions to Unitarianism and thus elevated it to being part of God's evolutionary plan for humanity. Carpenter lifted Unitarianism from being merely a small Christian denomination to being, in his eyes, the vehicle of God's will. He did this by identifying the seven criteria for advanced religion, the criteria first introduced in Chapter 3 of the thesis. As was then noted, these criteria comprised the centrality of ethics, social progress, the abandonment of myth, the conquering of ignorance, universal personal salvation, monotheism and joy. In different ways and at different times Carpenter characterised Unitarianism by means of these criteria. For example, the rejection of the idea of humanity's total depravity led, he said, to Unitarian philanthropy and the denomination's efforts to uphold ethics and to bring about social progress (1925a, p.10). Unitarianism's determined affirmation of monotheism was illustrated, said Carpenter, by Martineau's renunciation of the "necessarian pantheism" of his youth (1925a, p.8). The other religions, he felt, were now adopting those principles. If these criteria were essential elements of the ideal religion, then Unitarianism, embracing them as firmly as Carpenter believed it to be doing, was at the pinnacle of religious growth. This gave Unitarianism a very high status.

Fifthly, it must also be recognised that Carpenter's presentation of other religions gave Unitarianism an optimistic tone that was well needed. Unitarianism's strongest period of growth and activity was in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. After that there was first a moderate decline and then, after the Great War, a rapid decline. The Christian denominations generally declined also but Unitarianism was a small movement. Without a firm purpose it was difficult to envisage how it could make an impact on the larger world. Until the Great War Unitarianism had believed in the steady growth of humankind. The devastation of the Great War, however, helped to eschew the belief that human progress was evident. Carpenter remained optimistic after the Great War because he had another approach to the future. There was every reason to

be optimistic because of the progress made in religion, he believed. The study of the religions would enhance the role of Unitarianism and it could be viewed as the vehicle for the next stage in evolutionary development. Carpenter never wavered, either from his Christianity, nor from his commitment to the Unitarian movement. For him it had a strong and noble mission and the Unitarian movement in its turn was grateful for the status he awarded to it.

Finally, Carpenter contributed to Unitarianism by helping to break up the dominance of the parties within it. Although Martineau had freed it from an aggressively dogmatic position it was still locked in a struggle for theological cohesion. The two wings vied for dominance, not always constructively. Carpenter was supposedly part of the same liberal party within which Martineau had operated, yet he broke free of the Christological strictures Martineau had established. In a sense, Carpenter had helped to destroy the necessity for identification with wings or parties. His exploration of the beliefs of other religions had enabled him to reflect once again on his own theological position. It was grounded in his own experience and in the results of his work in Comparative Religion. He thus broke free to express himself in accordance with that position. Other Unitarians felt similarly able to explore and to establish their own theological position regardless of party or tradition.

As can be seen, Carpenter was a major figure in British Unitarianism. This would perhaps have been the case if his contribution had been limited to organisational concerns. This, however, was not the position. In several ways Carpenter's interest in Comparative Religion has had a direct influence on the theological direction of the British Unitarian movement. For that reason Carpenter is a figure deserving of attention.

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, Carpenter's approach to other religions was unusual and idiosyncratic and thus his work has tended to be overlooked by the academic world.

As a Unitarian, however, his work sets him apart as a figure of some importance. His work in popularising the teachings of the other religions together with his justification for elevating the theological position of Unitarian Christianity has made him one of the most important Unitarians of his generation.

Carpenter's work was acknowledged much more widely, however, although his evolutionary views were not given much credibility. It was his systematic treatment of other religions that was recognised by the world outside British Unitarianism as being of great merit. Sharpe called Carpenter a "gifted and enlightened" individual (1978, p.11) towards whom a debt is owed that is "considerable" (1975, p.129). The Public Orator of Oxford University, following Carpenter's death in 1927, suggested that his death would be mourned, not just by his own community, but by Theology itself (Herford, 1929, p.90).

It was, however, within the Unitarian community that his impact was greatest. Carpenter's work is characterised by a tremendous conviction. This conviction was that things were moving forward in a positive direction. A gradual awareness was taking place of a union of all humanity and this union, said Carpenter, was soon to be consummated. This confidence permeated every aspect of his life and work and enabled him to cast a spell upon his readers and hearers. This movement towards universal union, a movement that was evidence of God's coming full self-disclosure, was the basis for his religious stance, the justification for his Comparative Religion projects, and the spark that gave him the energy to promote inter-religious cooperation. To sum up his confidence, and to summarise Carpenter's life and work, it would seem most appropriate to use his own words, quoted earlier in a different context.

In the vast body of humanity all powers and gifts...come from the same God, and minister each in its degree to his glory. And their law is cooperation. We are calling for it in every department of activity...Religion, as it slowly comes into clearer consciousness of

itself, will aspire towards the same concord... God grant us grace to welcome and use our opportunities, and then for us the prayer, "Thy kingdom come", will be fulfilled (1910d, pp.23-24).

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